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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FRESHMAN ACADEMIES ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

By
Willie Matthews

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FRESHMAN ACADEMIES ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family. I appreciate my mother, brother, sister, nieces and nephews for their permanent stance by my side. Still, I have learned in this life that your blood line does not always define or limit to whom you are to hold near and dear to your heart. To each of the individuals in my life, past and present, that I have grown close to and developed a kinship with through sharing a laugh and smile, a word or hug, or even a cross word or hurt feelings, I appreciate you for who you are and the role God allowed you to have in my life. Your contribution has awarded me the ambition to press on regardless of what things around me look or feel like and through whatever that may be said.

It is through these bonds that God has enabled me to grow into the man that I have become and been instilled with the values and characteristics that prepared me to succeed at this venture. This experience has been far more than conducting research and writing a paper, but a process of sacrifice and determination in overcoming obstacles to attain your goals. Through it I have discovered and now understand that all things do work together for the good of those that love God and that sometimes the objectives He places in our lives are for his glory, not ours!

A special dedication to three significant women who has influenced and impacted my life.

I thank my Mother for her belief in me and teaching me to have confidence in myself. Thanks for all the countless hours you dedicated to being an encourager, a counselor, a listener but most importantly my mother and my friend!

I would like to thank my Godmother who has continuously prayed and helped to keep me uplifted. You have been a friend, a prayer warrior, and you have always kept my

best interest at heart! Thank you for traveling on this road with me even when times were tough.

Last but not least, I dedicate this in memory of my Grandmother whose strength and presence through the prayers she prayed carry me daily. She had a great impact on my life by teaching me morals and giving me a structure and foundation to lead, to achieve and to succeed. Although she did not live to see me accomplish this goal I know she is watching over me and smiling for a job well done.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The significant impact of transitioning to ninth grade has necessitated the need to examine the effects of the secondary school structure on African American males. These students were often assumed to be capable of functioning and maintaining personal accountability within their new, less structured environment, as opposed to the structured setting they encountered in middle school (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). As a result, these adolescents encountered increased challenges often resulting in greater challenges and lack of motivation that does not cater to their learning and developmental needs (Ellerbrock & Kiefer).

Bethel (2012) indicated that environmental characteristics of the school setting impacted the success of African American students. According to Donner and Shockley (2010), the education system continues to fail to serve African American males because around 70% of these young men are not graduating high school with their incoming freshman class.

> Kunjufu (2011) reported that only 12% of African American males are proficient in reading, 80% of African American male students are in special education, and 53% of African American males drop out of high school. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2010) report revealed that the overall 2007/2008 graduation rate for African American males in the United States was only 47%. Less than 8% of African American males between the ages of 15 and 29 years were college graduates. This is in comparison to 17% of European Americans and 35% of

Asian American males in this age group (Land, Mixon, Butcher, & Harris, 2014, P. 243).

The socioeconomic status of African American males was an ongoing determinant of the success for many African American students (Bethel, 2012). In many cases, African American males from these environments were negatively labeled and identified as underachievers which habitually created negative internal personalization of their community. This negative personalization of their community then set the course for their behavior and their mindset that further hindered them from being productive contributors to the educational system (Land et al. 2014). Among these challenges, they also combated cultural misperceptions, deficiency of adequate instructional practices and resources, and the selection of under qualified teachers, which further inhibited the success of these young men (Bethel, 2012). Due to these occurrences and the standard norm established in most educational systems, African American males disassociate themselves further in school. Additionally, as they encountered the negative nuisances of their living environment there was the increased battle to avoid falling into the same practices that necessitated the need for additional support intervention for these youth (Land et al. 2014)..

Donner and Shockley (2010) proposed that modifications to the instructional approaches used to teach and assess learning were significant to the achievement of African American males both socially and academically. They further contend that these instructional approaches set high standards, incorporate a cultural awareness into the educational experiences and allow for the assessment of implicit social and political disparity. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) further supported this phenomenon and illustrated

the results of a study that surveyed the minds of ninth grade students to determine what they felt was necessary for a student to successfully transition into their freshman year of high school. They recognized that ninth grade participants sought a small, close knit learning environment that allowed them the ability to establish and maintain supportive relationships and to participate in engaging activities that were not only rigorous, but also personally relevant to their lives (Ellerbrock & Kiefer).

Statement of the Problem

The overall academic success of African American males has been significantly low in comparison to males of other ethnicities as they often fail to progress at the turning point in their life during their transition from middle school to high school. When students reached high school, they often encountered barriers their freshman year that many, unfortunately, were unable to overcome. Differences in gender, race, learning styles, external influences and esteem issues centered on their sense of belonging tend to create obstacles to keep students from successfully fulfilling the requirements of their freshman year. With numerous interventions available, the objective of this study is to identify potential characteristics that contribute to the downfall of African American males. It will also identify instructional strategies available to promote academic success for students when implemented in the framework of freshman academies to meets the learning needs of these males.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be used to guide this study:

To what extent have intervention strategies used by Ninth Grade Academy Administrators been successful with African American male participants?

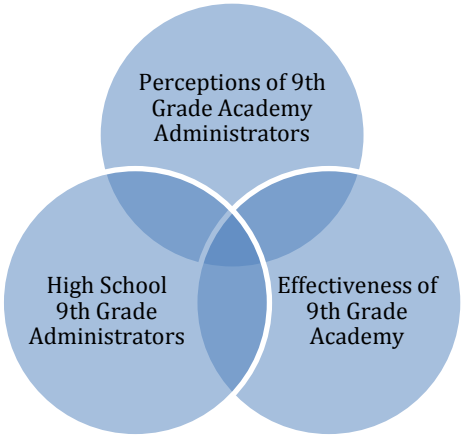
- According to Administrators, what is the distinguishing role and purpose of freshman academies?
- What is their perception of effective instructional practices to combat the academic challenges of African American freshman males and the implementation of the freshman academy?
- What evidence have administrators sought to help them understand success or failure of the freshman academy with African American males? How was it used?
- What issues affecting the African American male during this transitory year are administrators of freshman academies targeting and why?
- Are freshman academies a successful intervention? Why or why not?

The research questions presented were drafted based upon a careful review of the research literature.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the environmental factors, the methods of instruction, and the characteristics of social development that would need to be focused on in learning environments that embraced the nature of at-risk students and guided them into academic success. Freshman Academy administrators would be interviewed to determine from their perspective if an intervention, such as a freshman academy, will prove to be a beneficial strategy to target as a method to promote the success of African American males during their freshman year of high school.

Conceptual Framework


Perceptions of 9th Grade Academy Administrators
High School 9th Grade Administrators
Effectiveness of 9th Grade Academy

The conceptual framework for the study was based on the idea that freshman academies create an environment that foster the support needed for African American males to effectively transition into the high school learning environment. Many factors associated with the transition were overwhelming for them; however, the goals, the structure and the purpose of freshman academies were developed to offset the negative long-term consequences that result when necessary interventions were not in place (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Without the reinforcement that freshman academies provide, some African American males were more likely to be retained in ninth grade with the probability of dropping out of high school before finishing. Therefore it was critical that barriers which may prohibit them from reaching their success were eliminated and the appropriate interventions were initiated at the beginning of the freshman year.

Methodology

The methodology of this study will be qualitative in nature for the purpose of determining which interventions principals use in regards to developing safe guards for

African American males and to find out how successfully they were implemented. The researcher will interview principals of freshman academies to obtain details on the effectiveness of this form of small learning community on the academic improvement of African American males.

Significance of Study

This study acknowledged numerous issues affecting the ability of African American males to be successful. It will be available for use by administrators facing the struggle of determining best practices to meet the growing problems with the ninth grade failure rate among African American males. In studying the success of African American males entering into their freshman year of high school, it can be seen that they have long been at-risk in school due to poor academic achievement (Holcomb-McCoy 2007). Whereas African American males were capable of being taught the curriculum, their reluctance was often imparted in response to the low expectations, lack of emotional and psychological support, and constant racial criticisms they encounter from teachers and society that drive them to flee from the educational environment prior to actually fulfilling their commitment to graduate (Wright, 2009). This study will investigate how intervention strategies were utilized to support the growth, development, and impact of engagement for these young men, and then identified how freshman academies targeted and catered to the overall transitory difficulties that affect their progress beyond the ninth grade.

Limitations of Study

Limitations to this study may result from the following circumstances:

1. Small sample size based on number of freshmen academies in the State of Georgia.
2. Reliance on self-reporting of data from responses received during interviews with administrators.
3. Each school may use different practices limiting the ability to measure the effectiveness of a given practice.

Delimitations of Study

1. The sample was very concentrated in dealing only with Freshman Academy Administrators.
2. Only specific secondary schools in Georgia have Freshman Academy programs.
3. The role of these Administrators was very specific as they only dealt with 9th grade students.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following key terms are defined:

Administrator: an authority figure either in the role of principal or assistant principal designated to lead and manage the daily operations of the Freshman Academy.

S*mall Learning Communities*: environments with lower enrollments that tend to show greater academic improvements. Smaller learning environments provided students with a welcoming atmosphere that was more suitable to interacting with their classmates and receiving personalized assistance which contributed a more disciplined attitude and a stronger commitment to meet academic demands (Stewart, 2008).

Freshman Academies or Ninth Grade Academies: Freshman Academies have a distinct structure in which students are isolated from the general student population to ease the transition to high school and set a higher academic standard for those ninth grade students (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010)

Stage environment theory: examines how well the school was organized to meet student needs and to determine the degree of development encountered within the school environment (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013).

Self-determination theory: describes the need for schools to concentrate on the undeveloped psychosocial needs of students that encourage their independent drive to excel (Ellerbrock & Kiefer).

Multilevel conceptualization theory: an integration of stage environment and self-determination theory which suggests that positive interaction is resultant of the student's developmental needs being met, thus creating a bond and a sense of conformity to the objectives within that learning environment (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010).

Triangulation: The use of multiple data collection strategies to increase trustworthiness of conclusions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Summary

In the chapter, the researcher identified the freshman academy as a means of support for the academic success of African American males during their transition into high school. It specified issues that negatively impact their ability to succeed during their freshman year. Freshman academies were believed to provide a foundation and support that equipped students for long-term academic success. Through the examination of the

perceptions of freshman academy administrators, the researcher hopes to describe the characteristics which render this an effective intervention for African American males.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The intent of this chapter was to explore the benefit of African American males attending Freshman Academies as a means of eliminating obstacles in their academic pursuit. This study identifies common barriers that many students encounter, but that were significant to the continued academic challenges of African American males. It provided insight on strategies that showed significant differences in educational process and to the needs of males. It further described how these strategies, combined with an environment catering to freshmen, offered the necessary support to produce positive academic outcomes.

Numerous issues affected the academic progression of African American males. After these young men transitioned into the ninth grade, academic struggles often hindered them resulting in increased drop-out rates in ninth grade. As a result, these factors raised questions pertaining to the support African American male students received in the transition from middle school to high school. It was also necessary that processes be identified to help keep them in school and reduce the ninth grade retention rate. For this study, the success of the freshman academy, used by administrators as an intervention strategy with African American males in their transition from the middle school to high school, has been evaluated.

The Middle School Transition

Students struggled throughout their transition from middle school to high school (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Students lacked preparation as they transitioned from middle school to high school in three predominate areas. Firstly, students had a hard time adjusting to the academic structure and expectations of the high school environment as well as the individual responsibility that came along with it (Andrews & Bishop). This resulted from an environmental shift from dependency on a structure that molded their every action to an environment that required them to function independently without the necessary abilities to do so (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman & Smith, 2000).

Secondly, students had difficulties acclimating with the procedural day-to-day rules that dictated their behavior and the consequences when the rules were broken (Nield, 2009). Higher stakes accountability required them to function more maturely without the intense supervision and guidance with which they were familiar (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Lastly, struggles existed socially as students faced the pressures of creating new relationships with peers and school personnel (Andrews & Bishop). Students were no longer functioning within the well-known boundaries that promoted a safe environment(Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). “The large, bureaucratic nature of most high schools often is not supportive of incoming ninth graders with weak social and academic preparation” (Letgers & Kerr, 2001, p 2). The academic and behavioral issues often heightened during these transitions, resulting in decreased academic effort and increased failure during the ninth grade year amongst low socioeconomic students (Andrews & Bishop). In effect, when African American males were presented with these odds, they were of greater risk of disruption in their academic progress (Marsh, Chaney, & Jones,

2012), thus creating the increased likelihood of becoming a dropout as a result of transition (Letgers & Kerr, 2001).

Table 1: Middle School Transition

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Letgers & Kerr, 2000	To promote successful transition to high school	174 high schools	Quantitative: Survey	There is over-representation of school-within-a-school, interdisciplinary teaming and Homeroom/advisory groups for ninth graders large high poverty, minority schools.
Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012	Explore how young Black students remain resilient in racially diverse setting.	58 Black females 33 Black males	Qualitative: Interview, Questionnaire	In this study, young Black men and women were resilient by: 1. Overcoming their self-doubt 2. Regarded their symbolic brethren as motivators for success.

Environmental Aspects

Researchers indicated that the environmental changes from the middle school atmosphere to that of the high school setting created a shift in the role and demeanor of students. “These include increased student population size and heterogeneity; changes in

school day structure; more teachers with a variety of teaching styles, rules, and expectations; high-stakes grading; and stricter school policies" (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, p. 253). Students were contentious about their relationships with teachers and classmates due to the overwhelming adjustment to new protocols and unfamiliarity that forced them into a new level of accountability.

In addition, African American males were challenged when they were removed from the isolation of non- diverse surroundings that limited their ability to interact in diverse settings (Marsh et al. 2012). As a result of the significance often placed on acceptance and fear of rejection from peers at this stage in their life, students were subject to high levels of anxiety (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). As critical components of the transition process were defined, the preparatory aspect identified through interventions provided a foundation for a seamless shift to the ninth grade setting (Nield, 2009).

Factors associated with living in urban environments also affected the achievement of African American males. Schools in urban areas were often abandoned because districts provided insufficient financial resources to operate them efficiently. They were often older and outdated structures that required more extensive and repairs that were inadequately done (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Good teachers became weary in the struggle to successfully teach students with academic and behavioral challenges; they sought after employment in other schools leaving students with teachers that were less experienced and incapable of handling them and providing them with the rigorous course work they needed to challenge their abilities (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). These insufficiencies greatly contributed to the inequality in achievement.

The combination of deteriorating buildings and declining academic achievement led to further abandonment of these urban communities. It prompted families to begin moving out of these environments to more prominent schools and districts leaving behind those who could not afford or were not willing to make such transitions (Uwah et. al, 2008). The students that remained, being of lower socioeconomic status, were subject to performing lower and faced greater difficulties in closing the achievement gap. Studies showed that African American males retained during their elementary school years were more likely to drop out when reaching high school (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). This was an indicator of an existent trickle down-effect resulting when students on lower grade levels did not meet the academic targets levels they should have attained to be on grade level, causing them to be academically unprepared or behind when reaching high school.

In addition, African American males have been critically stereotyped because of labels placed on them as being threating to society, academically mediocre and emotionally disturbed; labels were based upon the classification of the environments from which they came (Ford & Moore, 2013). Unfortunately, they were also subject to a continued generational trend of economic poverty due to these social and economic conditions. Consequently, as some African American males faced these types of challenges and circumstances, unfavorable emotions were triggered that caused them to act out in a hostile or depressive manner as they isolated themselves physically or mentally (Klem & Connell, 2004). A response of this nature has contributed to the shut down and unproductive behavior that some minority males have demonstrated, thus undermining their motivation to excel academically (Ford & Moore).

Table 2: Environmental Factors

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012	Explore how young Black students remain resilient in racially diverse setting.	58 Black females 33 Black males	Qualitative: Interview, Questionnaire	In this study, young Black men and women were resilient by: 1. Overcoming their self-doubt 2. Regarded their symbolic brethren as motivators for success.
Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008	Examine the relationship between perceptions of school belonging, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations	40 African American males 11 freshmen 29-sophmores	Quantitative: Survey	The primary hypothesis of the study was not supported. Perceptions of school belonging were not positively related to academic self-efficacy in the sample studied.
Montgomery & Hirth, 2011	Examines the impact of a freshmen transition program for at-risk students at a large urban high school	130 HEART Program participants 122 Non-Heart participants	Mixed Methods Quantitative: Student Demographics GPA/Number of Credits Qualitative: Interviews	The overall experiences of the participants affirmed that transition programs for at-risk students must provide a sense of belonging, teachers must be able to build strong relationships with students, and life-skills should be an essential component.

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging or connectedness was essential for the development of African American males (Uwah et. al., 2008). The description of a psychological sense of school belonging was defined as the degree of acceptance, understanding, and respect that the school community gives them (Uwah et. al, 2008). Students who were products of environments supportive of learning had increased chances of being academically competent students (Woolfolk, 2008). Unfortunately, many African American males entered high school as "at risk" students due to poor academic achievement in earlier grades and past failures while living in unsupportive homes and community environments filled with stigmas and ostracism (Ford & Moore, 2013; Holcomb-McCoy 2007). This, in effect, inhibited African American youth in the development of self-worth and an understanding of how they fit in within the community (Holcomb-McCoy). Therefore, it was especially pertinent for African American males to be involved in productive and engaging activities at school; otherwise, they faced the challenge of dropping out due to disengagement (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009).

African American males need the structure teachers provided to help identify their role and validate their sense of belonging (Marsh et al. 2012; Booker, 2006). Student's relationship with teachers and classmates significantly impacted their sense of belonging (Provitera-McGlynn, 2003). When African American males saw that they were embraced in an environment that required them to establish standards and reach expectations, they were more likely to remain engaged in school and aim to fulfill those goals (Klem & Connell, 2004). This, in turn, reflected that there was a vital link between teacher relationships and student engagement. In most cases, these young men lived in lower

socioeconomic environments that did not value education and did not emphasize academic achievement.

Table 3: Sense of Belonging

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008	Examine the relationship between perceptions of school belonging, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations	40 African American males 11 freshmen 29-sophmores	Quantitative: Survey	The primary hypothesis of the study was not supported. Perceptions of school belonging were not positively related to academic self-efficacy in the sample studied.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009	Enhance male**,** Black middle school students' academic achievement through mentoring	61 Black 8th grade males	Quantitative: Surveys	This study: 1. Supports the effectiveness of an Afrocentric mentoring program in fostering academic success and achievement of middle school Black boys. 2. Identifies how the factors of racial identity statuses and identification with academics are linked to GPA and standardized achievement test scores.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Klem & Connell, 2004	Examined links between teacher support, engagement and academic success	Students, teachers, parents	Quantitative: Surveys	Teacher support is important to student engagement in school as reported by students and teachers. Students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair. Results in variables predictive of high school completion: 1. high levels of engagement 2. higher attendance 3. higher test scores

Cultural Differences

According to Ford & Moore (2013), "The achievement gap is a comparative term that compares and considers the discrepancy in performance between African American students and White students, with the performance of Whites designated as the norm." This achievement gap between African American and White students exist as a result of a saturation of Eurocentric values in the educational curriculum that opposed the values African American culture (West-Olatunji, Shure, Garrett, Conwill, & Rivera, 2008). Knowledge, as seen in the African American culture, was something gained through

experience and through consequence (West-Olatunji et al. 2008). On the contrary, the European values, were defined by their individual nature and desire to acquire possessions, and disregard for spiritual and cultural values commonly found in the African American communities (West-Olatunji et al. 2008).

Characteristics of families composed of the traditional unit of two parents and a couple of kids or living an independent lifestyle described the prevailing family structure for Caucasian families (Tutweiler, 2005). In contrast, other cultures, to include African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Native American families, support an extended family structure (Atkinson, 2004). African American families were inclined to consist not only of kinship, but also of individuals that were emotionally bonded (West-Olatunji et al. 2008).

A difference in student's communication, conduct, and perception was influenced within their living environments (Hale-Benson, 1986). Cultural beliefs of African Americans and other ethnicities and were belittled by teachers that only supported the governing white, male middle class values that dominated society (Nitri, 2009). Due to the cultural background of the teacher dictating the understanding of the student, behaviors and mannerisms of African American students were typically misunderstood and thought to be disobedience rather than a reflection of cultural habits (McDougal, 2009). Therefore, further research by McDougal (2009) emphasized that teachers should be trained and instruction based on ethnic uniqueness of each student. When a student's culture was aligned with the curriculum, African American students showed greater academic performance (Shockley, 2007).

Although the Brown v. Board of Education 1954 decision opened the door for equity in education among races, disparity in academic achievement among African American students, more so in black males, still remained (West-Olatunji et al., 2008). Indicators reflected that African American students lagged in achievement in core areas by the time they reached third grade.

> As a group, African American students constituted roughly 14.8% of public school enrollment in 1998, yet compared with their European American counterparts, were disproportionately identified and placed in categories such as mental retardation (18.9%), specific learning disability (45.2%), and emotional disturbance (10.7%) (West-Olatunji et al., 2008, p. 135).

Research studied by Shockley (2007) suggested that exceptional academic achievement was based on the student's "identity, culture, and social experiences (p.110)." It was assumed that African American students received a greater ability to interact with individuals of different races when they were placed in diverse school settings (Marsh et al., 2013). Research by Irving and Hudley (2008) implied that when these students were exposed to learning environments that were economically plentiful and racially diverse and resistant to the development of aggressive attitudes regarding the principles of the dominant culture would not encounter undesirable academic outcomes. However, as the growth in diversity within schools increased, it paralleled the overload of white female teachers (88-99% of the teaching profession nationwide) (Ladson-Billings, 2005). According to Ford & Moore (2013), due to the disproportion of cultural representation in urban schools, there was a four-year deficiency in academic

performance in Math and Reading between African American students, especially with African American males and White students.

Table 4: Racial Differences

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012	Explore how young Black students remain resilient in racially diverse setting.	58 Black females 33 Black males	Qualitative: Interview, Questionnaire	In this study, young Black men and women showed resilience by: 1. Overcoming their self-doubt 2. Regarded their symbolic brethren as motivators for success.
Irving, & Hudley, 2008	Explored the variability of individual African American adolescents' academic achievement motivation by examining students' resistant racial identification	115 male African American students enrolled in 11th and 12th grade	Quantitative: Surveys	In this study, our regression model reveals that cultural mistrust, oppositional cultural attitudes, and outcome value are all significant predictors of expectations for the benefits of their educational outcomes.

Learning Differences

The success or failure of male learners was determined by differences in the way they understood information according to their individual learning experiences (Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013) "As the feelings, emotions, attitudes, and backgrounds of individuals are different from each other, each person acquires and learns information in different ways" (Duman, 2010, p. 2078). As a result, they were not necessarily slower to achieve because of a disorder, but as a result of ineffective instructional practices that did not cater to their specific learning needs (Johnson & Gooliaff). According to Bellah, Robinson, Kaufman, Akers, Haase-Wittler, & Martindale, 2008), findings from research on the brain indicated that in order for experiences to be significant to the learning and teaching process; they must be tangible and multifaceted. Students who were taught using motor activities made the connection between information taught and the overall learning objective, which provided students the opportunity to embrace and reflect on learning (Johnson & Gooliaff).

Unique experiences affected the process by which students think and learn (Hryniuk-Adamov, 2010). Duman (2010) suggested that the rules that govern how the brain processes information should dictate the instructional model implemented in the classroom. The interpretation of learning styles required the ability to understand how the brain worked (Bellah et al., 2008). However, individuals differed in the way they perceived information. "When a student learns new material, the neurons in the brain connect together, thus, allowing the student to think through the activity, react to it, and function in varying situations" (Bellah et al., 2008, p. 19). As a result, professional development for teachers working with males, particularly African American males,

should have been directed at ensuring teachers were equipped with the appropriate strategies to present information to ensure students comprehension (McDougal, 2009).

Table 5: Learning Differences

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Johnson and Gooliaff, 2013	Encourage strategies in teaching that motivate boys to learn	9- 3rd grade males	Mixed Method; Qualitative: student surveys, teacher journaling, portfolios Quantitative: Surveys	In this study, positive results were achieved and academic growth was boosted for all boys who were served by this project when there was an increase in student excitement and engagement.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Duman, 2010	Investigate the effects of Brain-based learning (BBL) on the success of students with different learning styles.	3rd year students in University program 34 Experimental group 34 Control group	Quantitative: Pretest and Post-test	The most common learning style possessed by both the control and experimental group students was the assimilating learning style, and the least common one is the accommodating learning style.
McDougal, 2009	To reveal how new information and concepts are presented to them by their teachers.	29 males 7th-12th grade	Qualitative: Interview	These findings suggested that the participating students would benefit greatly from problem-based teaching strategies and culturally relevant instructional techniques.

Gender Differences

Educational aspirations were often lower for boys than girls (Wood, Kaplan, & McLloyd, 2007). This is due in part to differences in biological characteristics that exist in the way they learned and behaved (Piechura-Couture, Heins, & Tichenor, 2011). Protocols were established in the typical classroom for students to follow requiring them to sit and conduct themselves in an orderly demeanor; these behaviors required use of fine motor skills which most boys were not as adapt at doing (King & Gurian, 2006). This, in essence, contradicted the common attributes found in males who modeled an

aggressive physical behavior that was inattentive in nature and did not allow them to do more than one thing at a time (Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013).

Thus, when teaching practices failed to align with the learning needs of students, misjudgments were made about the academic performance of African American males without consideration for the diverse patterns that existed between the way they perceived and processed information (Martinez, 2010). Once behavior problems surfaced among young boys, disciplinary actions were prompted, ultimately causing disengagement in school (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). As a result, young males specifically faced increased suspensions, referrals to special education courses, and being placed on medicine because they were classified as having attention deficit disorder (Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013).

The organization of the retina, the cochlea, and the automatic nervous system reflected significant differences based on gender that was essential to learning (Piechura-Couture et al. 2011). It was more beneficial for males to participate in activities that were engaging, hands on and that provided a conceptual understanding for that reason. If hands on, engaging opportunities were not in place, males lost their focus and ambition to learn (Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013). Girls, by comparison, had a retina that focused on detail and color differences utilizing the fine motor skills all students were required to follow (Sax 2006). Further, girls had a distinct ability to decipher sounds at greater frequencies for interpretation, while boys tended to not comprehend as well, often giving the impression that they were off task and not paying attention (Piechura-Couture et al.). These behaviors frequently resulted in boys feeling isolated, causing them to respond by acting

out in the classroom because they were misunderstood by teachers (Gurian & Stevens, 2010).

> Boys are naturally rambunctious and seek opportunity for exploration and fun, using their imaginations to re-enact superhero activities. But as their natural learning behaviors become less acceptable in school settings, boys often lose their excitement for learning and motivation for school, resulting in a lack of academic success (Mulvey, 2010, p. 36).

When addressing the experiences of African American males specifically, these young men lacked the enthusiasm necessary to perform at the expected academic level in comparison to females (Wood et al., 2007). “African American boys are more likely than girls to have experienced prior academic difficulties, including placement in special education classes, school suspensions, grade retention, and poor academic performance” (Wood et al., 2007). Cokley, McClain, Jones & Johnson (2012) conducted a study on the relationship of academic self-concept and grade point average of African American males and females. The results indicated that there was a considerable fall in the correlation of academic self-concept and grade point average for the African American male participants contrasting the significant rise for African American females (Cokley et.al.). This further indicated a lower expectancy in the achievement of African American males as reflected in their grades and actual performance, not in their learning potential (Ford & Moore, 2013; Cokley et.al.).

Table 5: Gender Differences

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Piechura-Couture, Heins, & Tichenor, 2011	Examines the question if a different educational format, such as single-gender education, can help boys' behavior.	2200 Students, 178 Parents, 181 Teachers	Quantitative: Surveys	The results presented provided preliminary evidence that the single-gender format was an option that should be explored to reduce the overrepresentation of males and minorities in special education
Johnson and Gooliaff, 2013	Encourage strategies in teaching that motivate boys to learn	9- 3rd grade males	Mixed Method; Qualitative: student surveys, teacher journaling, portfolios Quantitative: Surveys	Positive results were achieved and academic growth was boosted for all boys who were served by this project when there was an increase in student excitement and engagement.
Montgomery & Hirth, 2011	Examines the impact of a freshmen transition program for at-risk students at a large urban high school	130 HEART Program participants 122 Non-Heart participants	Mixed Methods Quantitative: Student Demographics GPA/Number of Credits Qualitative: Interviews	The overall experiences of the participants affirmed that transition programs for at-risk students must provide a sense of belonging, teachers must be able to build strong relationships with students, and life-skills should be an essential component.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Cokley, McClain, Jones & Johnson, 2012	examine academic misidentification along with demographic and psychological factors related to the academic achievement of African American adolescents	96 African American students (41 males, 55 females)	Quantitative: Surveys	Results indicated significant differences in GPA, with female students having higher GPAs than male students but no significant differences in academic self-concept, devaluing academic success, or racial identity.

Interventions

Teacher Preparation

In order to effectively provide a positive educational experience to a diverse group of students, training programs should have been extensive with regards to diversity and challenges specific to at-risk students in urban schools (Khalifa, 2011). For instance, the overall academic success of students in urban schools was lower than that of their peers in suburban schools (Khalifa). Unfortunately, teacher training programs have not effectively produced teachers who could competently teach diverse groups of students of different racial backgrounds, students from low socioeconomic status, students with disabilities, and students who speak English as a second language (Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2010). Thus, urban children were more subject to a lack of exposure to their

cultural background and being educated on their past contributions in history through the local educational settings (Shockley, 2007).

Modifying teaching practices to accommodate the diverse needs of school-aged children was not traditionally a part of teacher preparation (Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2010). Although teachers may have met the minimum requirements for a teaching degree, the difficulty in establishing meaningful relationships with students, the lack of ability to exhibit relevance to the content, and a failure to differentiate instruction limited their effectiveness of teaching in culturally diverse settings (Duarte & Reed, 2004). The racial and cultural makeup of the educational setting provided teachers an understanding of the factors that each student embraced and how to reach them academically (Khalifa). A student's racial makeup motivated the level of connection they encountered based on diversity of the school and the community that it supported (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012).

According to Lynley and Valerie (2005), the inability to integrate practices that motivated students to engage and be challenged by the curricular standards increased the chances that students were not learning. Therefore, it was critical that developmental opportunities be prescribed to provide teachers with the necessary competences that would enable them to interact with a diversity of students as well as enhance the effectiveness of their teaching methods (Emdin, 2011). Because of the massive differences in learning styles, incorporating various learning strategies provided the differentiation needed to reach students of varying comprehension levels (Duman, 2010). When students were stimulated according to their abilities, they remained engaged and displayed greater productivity (Carrier, 2009). Students were more academically

challenged when they could associate themselves with the learning process physically, mentally, and emotionally (Emdin).

Table 7: Teacher Preparation

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Khalifa, 2011	Investigates the relationship between low teacher expectations and principal behavior.	9 teachers, Principal,1 social, worker, 10 students, 5 different individual family members	Qualitative: Field Notes, Participant Observation Interviews	The findings suggested that white teachers lower expectations because: 1. They feared students 2. Desired to maintain 3. Wanted to be accepted by their students.
Lemberger & Clemens, 2012	Examines how the small-group counseling component of the SSS program might affect the development of executive functioning, metacognition, and feelings of connectedness.	120 Students	Mixed Methods Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interview	The results of this study provided support for each of the three research hypotheses, namely, that an offering of the small-group counseling component of the SSS program influenced the development of self-reported connectedness to school and metacognitive skill.

21st Century Instruction

The overall makeup of lessons must contain content that has an appealing design and retains the interest to entice the diverse learning styles of students (Duman, 2010). Bellah et al. (2008) implied meaningful learning took place when learning was shifted from a teacher-centered focus to a learner-centered environment. It was the responsibility of the teacher to facilitate project activities that enhanced the student's perception of content, thereby creating a learner focus which encompassed physical, emotional, and social aspects that they can relate and create connections. Bellah et al. concluded, "Patterning refers to meaningful organization and categorization of information" (p. 16). Therefore, all areas of the brain were impacted when teaching-learning models connected with an individual's experiences and stimulated the corresponding hemispheres of the brain (Duman).

An important goal of engaging students in complex learning experiences was the incorporation of brain-based teaching strategies (Duman, 2010). With the necessary training, teachers challenged students academically in a way that created relevancy to the child's understanding further creating an emotional bond that assisted the student in retaining information (Connell, 2009). As teachers develop lessons, they should have foresight regarding the impact that the lessons have on the influence of other functions of learning and memorization on all other aspects of our life (Connell). Consequently, for at-risk students, brain-based learning activities should be more carefully distinguished from conventional teaching and learning strategies to ensure academic gains were made (Bellah et al., 2008).

Experiences, such as service learning, provided students with an up close and personal look at the importance and application of the knowledge they are working to

obtain. By students observing the performance of complex tasks that integrated knowledge and skills, they also developed the ability to create cognitive illustrations to guide the correct performance of the task as rehearsed mentally or physically providing the student with a purpose for the observation (Wouters, Paas, van Merrienboer, & Jeroen, 2008).

> The service learning methodology encompasses a plethora of effective teaching strategies which range from short volunteer placements to semester-long consulting projects, as well as individual or group based activities that may be mandatory or optional, and either embedded in the course content or offered as an extra-curricular activity (Calvert, 2011, p. 118).

Through these real-world scenarios, which gave meaning to performance, the learning experience was expedited for the student (Bellah et al., 2008). Calvert (2011) defined service learning by identifying four of its primary features which included offering hands-on learning, requiring reflection, incorporating community service to foster civic values, and building relationships that were advantageous to students and community.

Table 8: 21st Century Instructional Strategies

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Duman, 2010	Investigate the effects of Brain-based learning (BBL) on the academic achievement of students with different learning styles	3rd year students in University program 34 Experimental group 34 Control group	Quantitative: Pretest and Post-test	The most common learning style possessed by both the control and experimental group is assimilating learning style, and the least common one is the accommodating learning style.

Learning Environment

The need for organization and structure within a classroom were motivating factors that affected a student's academic performance (Ford & Moore, 2013). Students oppose structure and organization, but without it they lose a sense of security. Educators established expectancy with students as to what was required in their conduct, and appropriate consequences were identified that would result when those expectations were not met (Klem & Connell, 2004). Once a norm had been established students became comfortable in the process and they demonstrated respect for them. When students were given a specific structure in which they based their decision making, they could make decisions appropriate to their situation (Klem & Connell). Students were faced with the responsibility of making educated decisions but were unable to do so when they were not secure or were not provided the guidelines through which they should have modeled their responses (Khalifa, 2011).

In order to initiate academic preparedness, it was important to evaluate the student's learning environment. Consideration of environmental influence made it critical to identify negative factors that could potentially hinder the implementation of learning strategies in the classroom (Wilmes, Harrington, Kohler-Evans, & Sumpter, 2008). Without strategies for decreasing student anxiety, less attention was available for learning (Lantieri, 2008). Learning was minimized when students' mind were overcome with pressures and tension that caused them to be unfocused on learning (Lantieri). Often outside factors such as teen pregnancy, after school jobs, or family issues required the student to have larger responsibilities, as well as to deal with peer conformity (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). When a student's home life interacts with the self-sufficient actions of their learning environment, students showed a greater academic gain because these activities reinforced each other and facilitated a shared trust, common goals, and personal autonomy (Stewart, 2008).

When the school environment did not create a safeguard against negative factors, students did not feel comfortable engaging in the lesson. The sense of security developed within the student's learning environment should eliminate the fear factor, which often hindered a student's academic performance (Holcomb-McCoy 2007). Wilmes et al. further explained that when the body was subjected to these situations activating the fight or flight syndrome, the brain's recovery was dependent upon the amount of time necessary to allow stress hormones to release from the body. Therefore, when individuals that suffered from anxiety attacks participated in activities causing them to perform cognitive tasks, their performance was hindered, blocking the individual's ability to

breathe and also and to learn, preventing further processing and comprehension of information presented in the learning environment (Wilmes et al.).

A relaxed, positive environment enhanced learning opportunities. Students were encouraged in settings that prompted risk taking and participation in non-threatening environments in which ridicule and criticism did not exist (Bonjour, 2011). According to Marques (2012), by combining the use of humor with analogy and metaphors, students are prone to pay better attention and obtain a greater understanding of the content of which they are able to retain and recall. “Humor reduces anxiety and helps students understand the discussed material much better because they are more relaxed and motivated as opposed to students who feel anxious and threatened” (Marques, 2012, p. 66).

In the same manner, the use of multiple senses created stronger connections in the brain, enhancing memory and learning. According to Wilmes et al. (2008), the visual environment impacted learning by minimal modifications such as selecting colors that reduced stress yet encouraged creativity. Additionally, the significant role of music enriched the learning environment by creating powerful connections to the emotional, cognitive, and psychomotor features of the brain. Aromas stimulated the mind to initiate mood changes ranging from energy boosts to mental relaxation (Wilmes et al.). These techniques enabled students to learn by making connections through association of information to their emotions resulting in relevant learning (Lantieri, 2008).

Table 9: Learning Environment

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Klem & Connell, 2004	Examined links between teacher support, engagement and academic success	Students, teachers, parents	Quantitative: Surveys	Teacher support is important to student engagement in school as reported by students and teachers. Results in variables predictive of high school completion: • high levels of engagement • higher attendance • higher test scores
Khalifa, 2011	Investigates the relationship between low teacher expectations and principal behavior.	9 teachers and the school leader (principal), 1 social worker 10 current and past UAHS students, and members from 5 different families	Qualitative: Field Notes, Participant Observation Interviews	White teachers were more likely than Black teachers to allow students to disengage from academic tasks because of due to their inability to deal with the Black students' confrontational posture. Black teachers and the Black principal were willing to pressure and to force students to meet classroom and school expectations.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Montgomery & Hirth, 2011	Examines the impact of a freshmen transition program for at-risk students at a large urban high school	130 HEART Program participants 122 Non-Heart participants	Mixed Methods Quantitative: Student Demographics GPA/Number of Credits Qualitative: Interviews	The overall experiences of the participants affirmed that transition programs for at-risk students must provide a sense of belonging, teachers must be able to build strong relationships with students, and life-skills should be an essential component
Stewart, 2008	Examined individual and family-level variables that influence student achievement.	1238 African American Students	Quantitative: Surveys	Overall, the general conclusion from the analyses is that: 1. There are substantial associations between the individual-level predictors and students' academic achievement. 2. School structural factors have relatively small effects on student achievement in comparison with individual-level student characteristics. 3. Support was also found for the hypothesized relationship between school cohesion and academic achievement

Support Systems

The positive education of African American male students demonstrated that a student's perception of school influenced their success (Barile, Donohue, Anthony, Baker, Weaver, & Henrich, 2012). Relationships between students and teachers enabled teachers to create relevant scenarios and develop rigorous experiences (Ford & Moore, 2013). Unfortunately, in many cases the low performance of African American male students was because they were from low socioeconomic environments and often lacked role models in the home, school and community to encourage them to do better (Ford & Moore). When these essential dynamics were absent, student-teacher relationships served as a support system for African American males, which were necessary for them to prepare mentally for the pressures of transitioning to high school (Nield, 2009).

Relationship building was essential to developing the foundation for learning in the classroom (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). Students were emotionally involved and committed to learning when they had an established rapport with the individuals with whom they interacted (Woolfolk, 2008). Therefore in urban settings, it was advantageous to understand how students thought, acted and responded according to their cultural background (LaVonne, Audrey, Webb-Johnson & Bridgest, 2003).

According to Woolfolk (2008), "Because students differ in terms of language, culture, economic privilege, personality, knowledge, and experience, they will also differ in their needs, goals, interests, emotions, and beliefs" (p. 501). Sheppard (2009) further emphasized that the educational environment was significant in the process of African American males self-identifying, determining their role, and understanding how they

were perceived by others. Therefore, it was important for teachers to perform within the cultural parameters with which students were most familiar (Scherff, 2005). The emotional climate of students within a school was predictive of the school's ability to excel academically (Provitera-McGlynn, 2003).

Research by Klem and Connell (2004) indicated that an environment in which the teacher is concerned and supportive and where students could relate to one another created optimism resulting in a self-assured approach to academic challenges. The content or method in which students learned could not be separated from the feelings they associated with regardless of if the experience was positive or negative (Provitera-McGlynn, 2003). "African American children need to be part of an educational system that recognizes and draws on the strengths of their abilities and culture, and incorporates these strengths into the (teaching and) learning process" (Shockley, 2007).This supported the belief that if students felt good they would do well and accomplish greater levels of achievement. Learners with the desire to achieve were driven by a thought process affected by an environment reflective of individuals supportive of learning within it (Woolfolk, 2008).

Failure to develop teacher-student relationships, which allowed for the ability to assess a student's needs restricted effective teaching. The incapacity of a teacher to handle the demands of a diverse classroom resulted in a disparity of learning because it changed the level of curriculum and instruction, limited the extent of relationships between students and teachers, and altered the teacher's overall expectations (Scherff, 2005). It was necessary to understand that all students were not alike and that their needs often required different means of establishing social relationships with classmates and

other individuals that provide them with encouragement and positive reinforcement (Lynley & Valerie, 2005). The mindfulness of teachers that the atmosphere in which a student learns was not only important for creating satisfaction in the self-fulfillment of the student, but also for the purpose of intensifying their ability to engage in instruction (Lynley & Valerie).

"Our teacher education programs are filled with White, middle-class, monolingual female students who will have the responsibility of teaching in school communities serving students who are culturally, linguistically, ethnically, racially, and economically different from them" (Ladson-Billings, 2005). According to Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010), the large number of teachers servicing African American and other ethnic groups of students prompted an evaluation of expectation level set by these teachers in the pursuit of academic success for their students. Frequently, African American males were limited in their opportunities due to lack of confidence in their academic capabilities and failure to be nurtured by their teachers (Sheppard, 2009). As a result, research indicated that African American males felt mistreated and discriminated against by their teachers (Cokley, 2012).

Sheppard (2009) indicated in his research that African American males regarded their experiences within the educational setting as a conflict of the masculine role with which they identified. These young men felt the characteristics endorsed were feminine in nature, causing them to dispute their importance (Sheppard, 2009). The perception that school related activities undermine the masculinity of male students was also acknowledged to cause an increased level of behavioral disturbances and declining academic performance (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Consequently, as a feminine

association was placed on the school setting, teachers expressed a higher regard for their expectations of African females than they did for African American males (Cokley, 2012).

Table 10: Support Systems

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010	Identify the social supports in the lives of African American adolescents that influence resilient academic outcomes.	206 African American High School Students	Quantitative: Surveys	Descriptive analyses revealed that the adolescents sampled, overall, tend to experience moderate levels of school support from teachers, administrators, coaches, and staff.

Positive Behavior Support

When the support systems of African American males abandoned the positive reinforcement of establishing academic goals, these young men encountered greater opposition to succeeding in school (Ford & Moore, 2013). In order for students to maintain motivation to do well and to make academic gains, focus was placed on the needs of the students beyond that of instruction (Provitera-McGlynn, 2003). This required the necessary reinforcement from family and community advocates to be the ongoing influence to endure through hardships and succeed (Ford & Moore). Students had the need for food, shelter, and clothing first, and then the need for social acceptance. When those needs were unmet, focus was placed on achievements of other kinds,

implying that with such significant barriers to learning, they were unsuccessful at school (Woolfolk, 2008). Although concerned, many African American parents were limited in their availability and lacked the necessary resources to be active in their child's education (Ford & Moore).

Therefore, students needed to be able to recognize that the individuals most influential to their future and with whom they spend the greatest portions of their day were concerned and cared about their well-being (Klem & Connell, 2004). Proviteria-McGlynn (2003) reinforced the significance of the effect that connections to a warm environment that fostered bonding had on motivating students to attend school and perform academically. Teachers that developed these kinds of relationships were able to detect when students were lacking support outside of the classroom based on their performance, which often tended to decline or they showed other signs such as sleeping in class, absenteeism and aggression (Provitera-McGlynn). Henceforth, there was an importance for students to know that their teacher had a welcoming demeanor where respect was evident, assistance was available and explanations were appropriate to their understanding (Provitera-McGlynn).

Interactions that encompassed relevancy, a connection to students' lives, and support established a sense of belonging for the student (Woolfolk, 2008). When each of these factors was implemented, a student connected with their overall school environment (Provitera-McGlynn, 2003). The ability of a student to better understand relied upon the teacher providing frequent clear explanations of their learning objective with a connection to realistic experiences and by giving examples that demonstrated the appropriate application of such objectives (McDougal, 2009). When students could

associate practices from assignments to responsibilities and situations they encountered or that would impact their future, they understood the necessity of the work that equipped them to make important decisions (Klem & Connell, 2004). The more relevant it was to students, the more motivating it was for them to relate and incorporate the knowledge of their cultural experiences into their school life (Woolfolk).

Students that received constructive attention felt supported (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). Gestures of kindness and concern created a feeling of competence as a result of the student's understanding of the high expectations that the support system exhibited, acknowledging the significance of success and failure (Lynley & Valerie, 2005). Teachers and community supporters capable of creating this type of environment, between themselves and their students, were apt to promote a mirroring relationship amongst the students to form a greater bond (Provitera-McGlynn, 2003). Students benefited from a social climate demonstrating mutual respect for each other's opinions, from the ability of agreeing to disagree, from recognizing that different perspectives offered a new degree of insight, and from efforts to create dynamic classroom environments (Lynley & Valerie).

Table 11: Positive Behavior Support

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010	Revealed two major themes denoting the importance of teacher expectations and quality of instruction.	317 African American Seniors	Qualitative: Interview	The findings of this study led to three conclusions. First, the majority of the 48 students in this study believed that: 1. Race or ethnicity was a factor in the way that teachers treated them. 2. Respondents indicated some of their teachers have lower expectations for African American students 3. Students indicated that the most challenging and fair teachers tended to be in the disciplines of the languages and mathematics.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Sheppard, 2009	Describes an effort to provide prospective teachers opportunities to better understand African American male students and better focus on how they learn mathematics	42 Prospective Teachers	Qualitative: Narratives	Prospective teachers listened to the acute details of each student's experiences and transformed those into teachable moments. Prospective teachers remained persistent in hopes of unearthing the Hidden or Unmet Potential possessed by their students. This in turn demonstrated to the African American males in this study that their experiences matter.
Klem & Connell, 2004	Examined links between teacher support, engagement and academic success	Students, teachers, parents	Quantitative: Surveys	Teacher support was important to student engagement in school as reported by students and teachers. Students who perceived teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009	Enhance male, Black middle school students' academic achievement through mentoring	61 Black, 8th grade males	Quantitative: Surveys	This study: 1. Supported the effectiveness of an Afrocentric mentoring program in fostering academic success and achievement of middle school Black boys. 2. Identified how the factors of racial identity statuses and identification with academics are linked to GPA and standardized achievement test scores.

The Freshman Academy Concept

History of Freshman Academies

Freshman academies were formed at the turning point of education reform for the purpose of shifting high schools into learning environments that promoted skill development to academically compete in a competitive career markets (Styron & Peasant, 2010). Many ninth grade students have been unprepared to meet the social and academic challenges that high school brings, contributing to an ongoing problem of increased dropout rate and low student achievement (Styron & Peasant, 2010). The freshman academy was developed as a preventative measure to aid in the decrease of students dropping out and to develop an integrated academic program in 1969 (Styron & Peasant).

Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) supported the suitability of developing a freshman academy framework on the high school level. Styron and Peasant further confirmed that smaller learning environments with lower enrollments tend to show greater academic improvements. Smaller learning environments provided students with a welcoming atmosphere that was more attainable to interacting with their classmates and receiving personalized assistance which contributed a more disciplined attitude and a stronger commitment to meet academic demands (Stewart, 2008).

Ninth grade academies have the fundamental goal of providing students with emotional support in an academically rigorous environment (Styron & Peasant, 2010). They were designed to target students transitioning from middle school to high school as a means of developing social bonds to help them cope in their new environment as well as to create a learning environment that would cater to the academic inadequacies that students face while adjusting to high school curriculum (Emmett, 2012).

> Individuals have changing emotional, cognitive, and social needs and personal goals as they mature. Schools need to change in academically appropriate ways if they are to provide the kind of social context that will continue to motivate students interest and engagement as the students mature (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010).

Small learning communities, or freshman academies, have also been developed as a result of nonexistent relationships between teachers and students, disengaging lessons and often time crowded classrooms that contribute to the excessive number of students failing their freshman year of high school (Styron & Pleasant). Parental support declined during these developmental years and the role of teachers became more significant as they provided

greater influence in shaping the academic futures of their students (Cunningham, & Swanson, 2010).

Academic achievement within schools can be encouraged or discouraged based on the influence on the academic and social development of the student (Stewart, 2008). For instance, smaller learning communities were associated with greater outcomes because of positive behavior and academic experiences providing an atmosphere where students were more willing to engage in activities where they had greater accessibility to personal one on one interaction (Stewart). According to Wang and Eccles (2013), the cognitive, behavioral and emotional engagement of students was strongly tied to their ability to feel accepted by their teachers. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) explained this behavior in the context of the self-determination theory; stage environment fit theory, and a multilevel conceptualization of a caring school community. The social context in which children operated influenced their ability to adjust to the expectations of school and learn how to become successful students (Stewart).

Characterizations of the self-determination theory, stage-environment fit theory and multilevel conceptualization complement the objective of freshman academies and the impact they can provide to all students and with African American males specifically, as a measure to offset the challenges that affect them. Self-determination described the need for schools to concentrate on the undeveloped psychosocial needs that encourage students' independent drive to excel (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). The stage-environment fit theory examined how well the school was organized to meet these needs and to what degree the development was encountered within the school environment (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). The integration of these two theories forms the essence of multilevel

conceptualization. This theory suggested that positive interaction is resultant of their developmental needs being met, creating a bond and a sense of conformity to the objectives within that learning environment (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). As it related to freshman academies, the attributes of a small learning community provided students with a sense of belonging and the connections necessary for them to adapt, thus eliminating the potential of students becoming defiant, disengaged, and isolated and eventually dropping out (Mitchell, Bush, & Bush, 2002). It targeted urban learners, specifically African American males because they have situations that were unparalleled to those faced by African American females and Caucasian males (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009).

Table 12: History of Freshman Academy

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Styron & Peasant, 2010	Focused on student achievement in ninth grade schools or academies compared to ninth grade students enrolled in traditional high schools.	50-9th Grade Traditional Students 50-9th Grade Freshman Academy students	Quantitative: Archived Data	The findings of this study showed significantly higher test results for students enrolled in 9th grade academies and, as a result, the 9th grade academies found in this study appeared to be more effective in terms of student achievement than the traditional high schools. Further, Biology I data appeared to support the notion that 9th grade academies might enhance academic achievement, most notably for black students.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Stewart, 2008	Examined individual and family-level variables that influence student achievement.	1238 African American Students	Quantitative: Surveys	Overall, the general conclusion from the analyses was that: 1. There were substantial associations between the individual-level predictors and students' academic achievement. 2. School structural factors had relatively small effects on student achievement in comparison with individual-level student characteristics. 3. Support was also found for the hypothesized relationship between school cohesion and academic achievement

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Ellerbrock, & Kiefer, 2013	Focused on how students' needs are met within school environments as they make the transition from middle school to high school.	23 participants: 4 students, 4 middle school teachers, 13 high school teachers, 1 middle school principal 1 high school principal	Qualitative: focus-group interviews, individual interviews, classroom observations, and the archival data	Two main conclusions: 1. Structured aspects of middle school may have served as a way to promote a developmentally responsive school environment. 2. Middle school unstructured aspects, may not have served as a way to promote a developmentally responsive school environment.

The Freshman Academy Design

Freshman Academies have a distinct structure created to ease the transition to high school and to set a higher academic standard for those ninth grade students (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Students were typically moved to an isolated area of the building away from the dynamics of the traditional high school setting to eliminate distractions as students adjusted to the intensity of the high school curriculum (Riddle, n.d.). The freshman academies were organized to create a school within a school community with the same personnel and responsibilities that a high school would have, only to be focused on ninth grade needs to promote a healthy transition and build a sound education foundation their first year (Riddle). Students were shared among designated teams on a block schedule which allowed students to remain together as well as provided

teachers' time to collaboratively plan their instruction and develop common methods of governing their classroom and establishing student expectations (Connell et al. 2006).

The instructional and curricular design of Freshman Academies was developed to differ from the traditional high school setting, providing the structure needed for successful transition (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). "Students and teachers are typically organized into small, teacher-student interdisciplinary teams with team classrooms located in close physical proximity to each other that share common rules, procedures, and intervention strategies" (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010, p.395). These settings enabled teachers to pay specific attention to additional needs of their entering ninth graders that centered on a social, emotional, and academic perspective (Riddle, n.d.). Hence, as students developed stronger academic habits, teachers also experienced an improved attitude, which initiated an environment in which instruction and achievement were positively correlated; the curriculum was student focused and contained rigor and relevancy based on integrated academic content (Felner, Seitsinger, Brand, Burns, & Bolton, 2007).

The ninth grade academies were supported by all necessary components of a small learning community including freshman transitional classes, designated teachers and support staff, an extensive advisory curriculum, and support services to assist with academic and social needs (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010) An assigned guidance counselor and community specialist responsible for all entering ninth grade students worked cooperatively with teachers on school related-issues and addressed non-school related obstacles which affected students' academic achievement (Emmett, 2012).

Table 13: The Freshman Academy Design

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010	Focused on understanding how freshman small learning communities help students transition into high school in developmentally appropriate ways	67 participants 5 site based administrators 4 site-based small learning community coordinators, 3 freshman lead teachers, 33 freshman academy team teachers, 1 district-level small learning community director, 21 freshman academy students.	Qualitative: focus-group interviews, individual interviews, classroom observations, and the archival data	Two major conclusions materialized from this study. 1. First, the Freshman Focus program and the Freshman Focus teachers, not their freshman small learning community, were the essential elements in establishing a community of care for ninth-grade students. 2. Second, the development of positive teacher beliefs about students, supportive teacher–student relationships, and the promotion of academic and life skills had the potential to create a ninth grade community of care in which students were the primary receivers of care.

Cost Factors of a Freshman Academy

Researchers conducted cost comparisons of the expenditures associated to programs connected to high school dropouts in comparison to expenditures of dropout prevention programs which could save money and be more beneficial to members of society (Somers et. al, 2009).

> Costs to communities include an increased likelihood of deviant and criminal behavior in schools and neighborhoods that contain higher proportions of individuals who do not complete high school. Practical costs to the broader society include increased dependence on social programs, increased costs associated with incarceration as well as loss of potential contributions to the economy (Murray & Naranjo, 2008).

By pinpointing certain characteristics that were pursued through small learning communities, such as the need for involvement and belongingness, participation reflected a decline in the number of students being retained, reduced the dropout rates, and minimized deviant and criminal behavior in society (Barry & Reschly, 2012). Kennelly and Monrad (2007) found schools that conducted middle school transitional programs maintained an 8% dropout rate in contrast to schools without them, which had a had a 24% dropout rate. Dropout prevention programs offered budgetary relief for the billions of dollars being spent support the students who were failing academically (Somers et. al, 2009).

High school dropouts affected the economy by not generating enough revenues to appropriately fund government services which in turn created greater emphasis on the educational system to meet mandatory state and federal graduation rates (Barry & Reschly, 2012). According to research by Murray &Naranjo (2008), nearly 50% of

imprisoned inmates dropped out of high school and the earning potential for drop-outs that were not detained was reported to be on average around $19,000 per year. Such discouraging statistics indicated greater focus should be placed on dropout prevention initiatives focused on learning environments that embraced the nature of at-risk students and guided them toward academic success (Somers et. al, 2009).

Table 14: Cost Factors of a Freshman Academy

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009	Describes the results of a research evaluation of a school dropout prevention program and adolescents' self-reported perceptions of their motivations and role models.	205 9th graders	Quantitative: Survey	GPA was not the best indicator of achievement, because it involves so many other behavioral factors such as motivation, homework completion, class participation, attendance, student-teacher relationships.
Murray & Naranjo, 2008	Examines factors and processes associated with high school graduation in a high-risk urban context.	11 graduating seniors with learning disabilities	Qualitative: Interviews	Consistent with prior research on school dropout and school persistence, our findings suggested that a combination of individual and environmental factors and processes contributed to school completion among these high-

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
				risk youth. Within a risk and protective factor framework, the findings suggested that factors within individuals, families, and schools contributed to youths' persistence in high school.
Barry & Reschly, 2012	Improve the understanding of high school dropout using the engagement model through uncovering engagement-based predictors.	1643 Students	Quantitative: Archived Data	A three-step process for improving completion rates: 1. A predictive model including unalterable and alterable characteristics should be developed. 2. Predictors should be systematically monitored throughout the student's education. 3. Early interventions parallel to the predictive model should be implemented.

Advantages and Disadvantages of a Freshman Academy

Freshman academies presented numerous benefits to this momentary period of adolescents. According to McCallumore & Sparapani (2010), the presence of freshman academies fostered the increase of student attendance and parental support. Additionally, they helped initiate improved student behavior and teacher morale, which ultimately led to better test scores and academic achievement (McCallumore & Sparapani). The schedule afforded teachers time to work collaboratively with each other while interacting and monitoring the academic progress of their students (McIntosh & White, 2006). In addition, small school and class sizes allowed greater flexibility for the management of the student body (McIntosh & White).

However, there were criticisms for this model. The disadvantages to freshman academies caused some districts to eliminate them. Once students completed their one-year in the academy, they were still subject to face the same issues as they moved into the general high school population to continue into their tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade years (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Additionally, as teachers became dedicated to their mission within the freshman academy, they disconnected from the overall objective of the entire school, resulting in division and competitiveness among coworkers (Mclntosh & White, 2006).

Effects of the Freshman Academy

Freshman Academies provided students with a level of comfort and security that has enabled them to overcome their academic shortcomings (Emmett, 2012). The ability

to develop associations and personal alliances with peers and adults with whom they could relate motivated them to be more productive individuals (Riddle, n.d.). Further, research indicated that "the presence of high-quality teacher-student relationships (e.g., relationships characterized by high levels of trust, care, and respect) and emotional and cognitive support are critical for the positive development of students" (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010, p.393). Students took ownership in managing their learning when they were motivated, thus personalizing their school context (Felner et al. 2007).

> Creation of a more personalized context alters the regularities of the complex social setting of the school in ways that unlock student energy and motivation and that give students a sense of growth, of personal agency, of competence, of being someone whose individuality is recognized and fertilized (Gtazek & Sarason, 2007, p. 14).

Improvements made to adjust the student's learning environment to their developmental needs enabled them to develop and utilize the necessary abilities to successfully transition and embrace high school (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). This, in turn, created a more fitting atmosphere for learning because teachers were receptive to fulfilling the needs of their students and interactions between students were increased building better relationships in the learning environment (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011; Felner et al., 1982). By focusing on building relationships and requiring higher expectations, teachers had to commit to making a difference and improving the opportunity for success in their student's lives (Emmett). As students gained the independence to make their own decisions, they decided their own outcomes. They were also more likely to be committed and more adapt to remain engaged and involved to fulfill the given assignments (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As

a result, ninth grade academy models established the necessary environment to meet the academic and nonacademic needs of students, which established a base for success throughout the necessary environment to enrich these needs throughout the duration high school (Emmett).

Table 15: Effects of the Freshman Academy

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Montgomery & Hirth, 2011	Examines the impact of a freshmen transition program for at-risk students at a large urban high school	130 HEART Program participants 122 Non-Heart participants	Mixed Methods Quantitative: Student Demographics GPA/Number of Credits Qualitative: Interviews	The overall experiences of the participants affirmed that transition programs for at-risk students must provide a sense of belonging, teachers must be able to build strong relationships with students, and life-skills should be an essential component

SUMMARY

African American male students were challenged in their shift from the familiar structured and nurturing middle school environment to one that required greater self-discipline to meet higher academic, emotional and social demands. The intent of the Freshman Academy was to provide a supportive academic-focused setting for entering ninth grade high school students (Riddle, n.d.). Not addressing at-risk student needs during the transition period to high school provided the potential for higher dropout rates, lowered academic performance and socially inadequate individuals. Freshman Academies offer African American male students a safe foundation that concentrates on the needs of the students and bridges a relationship between students and teachers. The objective of these small learning environments was to further promote equitable achievement of all students by developing relationships that encouraged African American males to be actively involved in school activities and provided engaging instructional strategies that promoted their academic achievement.

This literature review captured the essence of the missing research needed to identify the components of successful ninth grade academies. No such literature regarding such academies was available in Georgia.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study focused on the perception of high school administrators on the contribution of freshman academies to the academic achievement of African American males. This study investigated how this intervention strategy will be used to support the developmental impact of engagement for these young men, and then identified how freshman academies targeted and catered to the overall transitory difficulties that affect their progress beyond the ninth grade. Administrators of freshman academies monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of these small learning communities to ensure the progression of African American males being able to adjust and succeed while facing higher academic, social, and emotional demands. Qualitative researchers interviewed such individuals in order to interpret their past circumstances, to evaluate relationships and obtain other forms of evidence that can provide insight of the acknowledged perspectives (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The chapter further examined the perception of these administrators about their understanding of the purpose of the freshman academy, the issues affecting African American males specifically during this transition, and the extent to which it was successful for these participants.

The basis of this study was for the purpose of evaluating the responses of administrators in accordance to their perception of the effectiveness of the described intervention. The researcher discussed the qualitative research design utilized in the

research along with a description of population and sampling plan for the study. The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview process to collect the necessary data to conduct this research. This chapter further described and provided an explanation of the research procedures necessary to analyze the data, to establish validity and reliability, and to ensure participants were informed and protected according to the Institutional Review Board.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be used to guide this study:

To what extent have intervention strategies used by Ninth Grade Academy Administrators been successful with African American male participants?

- According to Administrators, what is the distinguishing role and purpose of freshman academies?
- What is their perception of effective instructional practices to combat the academic challenges of African American freshman males and the implementation of the freshman academy?
- What evidence have administrators sought to help them understand success or failure of the freshman academy with African American males? How was it used?
- What issues affecting the African American male during this transitory year are administrators of freshman academies targeting and why?
- Are freshman academies a successful intervention? Why or why not?

The questions proposed to be answered were generated from information or by lack of information in the literature review.

Research Design

A descriptive research design was used for this study. Yin (2003) proposed this qualitative approach because it described an intervention and the real life context in which it occurred. It allowed the researcher to show, based on the perspectives of the administrators that oversee these freshman academies, if they contributed to the success of rate of African American males. According to Bogan and Biklen (2006), by using an interview to capture this information, the researcher was able to collect descriptive data based on their understanding of how the participant interpreted some pieces of the world based on their personal interpretation. In order to secure factual evidence the researcher recruited participants based on their direct association and involvement with freshman academies (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

This study was appropriately addressed through qualitative research because in seeking understanding of these administrators' assessments, this information was most impactful when gathered in its naturally occurring environment (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The procedures of the qualitative methods worked interactively and were not required to follow a defined protocol in conducting research (Maxwell, 2013). "For interviewing to be useful for this purpose, you need to ask about specific events and actions, rather than posing questions that make only generalizations or abstract opinions. Interviewing gives us access to observations of others" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 103). Unfortunately, these observations came distorted because people were selective in what they chose to discuss based on their personal ideologies (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The use of this type of qualitative data further enabled the researcher to extensively investigate the details associated with how the participants of the study are motivated by mere conceptions about the discussed phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). For this

purpose, the research design was accommodating to any shifts the researcher has to make throughout the process as new information is obtained (Maxwell, 2013).

Sampling

The populations of significance to this study were high school administrators' of freshman academies in urban schools. The demographics as to the location of the freshman academy will vary due to the setting and location of the districts throughout the state that utilize the freshman academy model. For purposes of answering the research questions posed, high school administrators consisting of principals, assistant principals, and any other principal designee in a leadership role will be included in the study.

A purposeful sample of high school freshman academy administrators will be used to conduct this study. The goal of purposeful sampling, as defined by Maxwell (2013) was to intentionally choose individuals who will be key in applying the theories initiated in or that are developed in response to the study. The participants of this study were selected based on their first hand encounters and familiarity with the environment (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviews were conducted on a selected sample of four administrators.

Instrumentation

In order to determine the perceptions of Freshman Academy Administrators, qualitative interviews were employed with respective administrators that worked in the Freshman Academy setting. Interviews were utilized in qualitative research to capture people's position that forms the basis of their decisions and judgments and responses to

their surroundings (Lindoff & Taylor, 2011). The interview was conducted one on one in person or via telephone or other technological assistive device to obtain information regarding the design, structure, and interactions of their freshman academy. A semi-structured interview was implemented to secure comparable data across subjects (Bogan & Biklen, 2006). The researcher developed interview questions that aligned with common themes of the literature review and sought to address the research questions governing this study. These interview questions were piloted with two current high school freshman academy administrators to establish internal consistency and content validity.

Table 16: Qualitative Item Analysis for Administrators

Item	Research	Interview Question	Research Question
Role of Freshman Academy Administrator	Letgers & Kerr, 2000, Ellerbrock, & Kiefer, 2013, Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010.	1	1
Academic Makeup of School	Letgers & Kerr, 2000; Cokley, McClain, Jones & Johnson, 2012	2	3
Implementation of Freshman Academy	Montgomery & Hirth, 2011; Barry & Reschly, 2012	3	1
Foundation of Freshman Academy	Barry & Reschly, 2012; Styron & Peasant, 2010;	4	3
Dropout Rate and Retention Rate	Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009	5	3
Needs Assessment	Murray & Naranjo, 2008	6	4
Best Fit Intervention	Duman, 2010; Montgomery & Hirth, 2011; Styron & Peasant, 2011.	7	1

Successes of Freshman Academy	McDougal, 2009; Johnson and Gooliaff, 2013	8	3, 5
Undesirable Outcomes of Freshman Academy	Irving, & Hudley, 2008; Khalifa, 2011.	9	3, 4
Changes since Implementation of Freshman Academy	Sheppard, 2009; Khalifa, 2011	10	2
Impact on Test Scores	Styron & Peasant, 2010; Klem & Connell, 2004	11	3, 5
Freshman Academy Impact on School	Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012; Klem & Connell, 2004	12	2, 4, 5
Initial Response of Student, Teacher, Parent, Community Response	Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Stewart, 2008	13	3
Student and Faculty Reaction	Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010;	14	2, 3
Student Population Demographics	Cokley, McClain, Jones & Johnson, 2012; Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012	15	3
Recommendation to Start Freshman Academy	Montgomery & Hirth, 2011; Styron & Peasant, 2010	16	1, 3, 5
Changes in Instructional Practices	Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Khalifa, 2011;	17	2
Examples of Successes with African American males	Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010; Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009	18	4, 5
Teacher Selection & Qualities for Freshman Academy	Montgomery & Hirth, 2011; Khalifa, 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004	19	1, 2
Teacher Motivation	McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; Felner, Seitsinger, Brand, & Bolton, 2007; Lynley & Valarie, 2005.	20	1, 2
Teacher Demographics	Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Ford & More, 2013, Ladson-	21	2

	Billings, 2005. .		
Longevity of Leadership	Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010. Styron & Peasant, 2010	22	1
Curriculum Needs	Duman, 2010; Klem & Connell, 2004.	23	2
Professional Development on Diversity and Differentiated Instruction Needs	McDougal, 2009; Duman, 2010; Khalifia, 2011; Shockley, 2007.	24	1

Pilot Study

Pilot studies provided the researcher with a benchmark of knowledge about the population being studied. This established a guideline to gauge how close the researcher's probabilities will be in matching up to the perceptions of participants in the study (Maxwell, 2013). When conducting the pilot interview, the researcher must ensure that the selected participants have knowledge and understanding comparable to the individuals that will participate in the actual study for the purpose of establishing content validity (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Reimer, 2012).

Feedback provided from the infield experts performing the pilot study ensure that questions align with the overall study and compiles a comprehensive amount of data material needed to establish reliability of the interview protocol (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). The pilot test should also allow the researcher an opportunity to determine if the content is understood as intended by the appropriate audience as to allow time to make corrections of any grammatical issues and adjust inappropriate word choices (Hennink et al, 2011). After the pilot interview has been analyzed, interview questions will be revised to reinforce the wording to encourage more detailed responses (Lapan et al., 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Difficulties were subject to arise at any time during a qualitative study that requires the researcher to be proactive and minimize such actions from occurring by being transparent regarding the expectations of participant and the research data (Maxwell, 2013). Human subjects are protected by two common rules governed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which requires that the researcher only utilize individuals on a voluntary basis that are fully aware of the stipulations and potential dangers that may be involved. As well, the venture cannot cause them any more distress than the worth of the incentive they are due for their involvement (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

As an initial measure before conducting any interviews, a formal application is submitted to IRB to conduct research on human subjects. Once the schools are selected that contain freshman academies, permission will be sought from those districts to conduct a study. Superintendents in those identified districts will receive a packet informing them to the purpose and nature of the study and also containing a consent letter for their signature of approval. All data obtained through interviews will be kept confidential, while also maintaining respect for the subject and their time, their privacy, and their freewill to participate in the study (Maxwell, 2013).

Data Collection

The semi-structured interview used for this study was created by the researcher and was based on intervention strategies developed from the review of the literature. The purpose of the interview was to gather demographic data about the school structure and setting, operational issues of the academy, and the principal's background and

perceptions of the freshman academy. The interview will start with a preliminary conversation that is general in nature and geared towards reassuring the subjects and building a rapport (Bogan & Biklen, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with high school administrators to gather data. Participating administrators will be sought through purposeful selection to choose six to eight principals and/or assistant principals, assigned to freshman academies throughout the state of Georgia. A letter and an informed consent form will be sent to selected interview participants notifying them of their scheduled interview time.

The interviews involved a degree of preplanning but included open-ended questions, addressing the instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by the administrator of the school, which will cause the overall interviews to vary in length and content (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The purpose of the study will be disclosed to all participants at the beginning of the interview. Upon completion of all individual administrative interviews, data will be transcribed, which after being forwarded to and returned from participants, a qualitative analysis will be conducted using the respondents' answers to code data into detailed categories and themes to begin the data analysis process (Maxwell, 2013).

Data Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a qualitative approach will be an appropriate procedure because it will describe the perspectives of the administrators at each setting, and then allow for review and explanation of the findings. They placed emphasis on early data analysis as motivation to expand upon the research throughout the process by means of collecting better and quality data. They believe that by joining data

collection and analysis, the analysis process becomes continual allowing for adjustment of disparities and the exploration of unseen perspectives. By distinguishing the main connections, more common justifications can be discovered by comparing the various results.

The researcher initiated the data analysis process by reading the content of the interview transcripts for understanding (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Once the meaning had been interpreted, each line was reassessed to identify significant thoughts of the administrators being interviewed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In conducting this initial analysis, codes that were reflective of the researcher's idea of the meaning of the text were identified (Miles & Huberman). This data was then taken and separated into similar categories based on commonalties of the emerging themes (Stemler, 2001). According to Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, "Qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278). The objective of content analysis in this study was "to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Miles & Huberman). For purposes of drawing reliable conclusions from the text when conducting content analysis, it was necessary to create coding instructions to ensure consistency among other individuals being able to conduct the same research and achieve the same results (Stemler, 2001).

Validity and Reliability

In order for the researcher to establish trustworthiness of the qualitative research data, strategies that certify the presence of reliability and validity must be incorporated in this study. "When qualitative researchers speak of research validity, they are usually

referring to qualitative research that is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible" (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). Triangulation was beneficial to establishing validity of research because it gave understanding to the initial problem (Thurmond, 2001). In addition, the confidence level improved because of a greater comprehension of phenomena and more significant findings (Thurmond).

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In this study, data sources, to include the perspectives of the administrators interviewed, the researcher's perspective and perspectives from the literature will be triangulated to examine the phenomena from various perceptions to identify regularities or irregularities in the research data (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). Data quality was enhanced through this process based on the gathering, comparison, and validation of findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The researcher can further strengthen support of the data by incorporating the process of peer debriefing and audit trail. Peer debriefing involved having an intellectual peer evaluate each step of research process along with the data to obtain their feedback for purposes of concluding the research (Anney, 2014). In addition, the use of audit trail gave the research another option to validate data. The audit trail required the researcher to be accountable for the product and have meticulous documentation reflective of every step and procedure conducted in the research process to be substantiating research data (Anney).

It is important to prevent the outcomes of qualitative research from being influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). According to Johnson & Christensen, "Researcher bias tends to result from selective observation and selective recording of information and also from allowing one's personal views and perspectives to affect how data are interpreted and how the research is conducted" (p.299). For purposes

of this study, the researcher will acknowledge background experiences that could potentially bias his interpretation of data in order to preserve validity (Maxwell).

Researcher Bias

The researcher was an African American male who grew up in a low socioeconomic environment, yet graduated from high school with academic honors as salutatorian in the senior class. After attending college and working in the corporate setting for several years, he transitioned to the field of education as a teacher working at his former high school, dealing directly with students in a low socioeconomic environment. Prior to transitioning to education, he also spent two years working in juvenile case management dealing with troubled youth.

The researcher's interest was African American males because he has confronted similar experiences. The objective was to be a resource to those individuals lacking the means and understanding needed to stay focused and to make positive decisions. When entering education, the researcher was only twenty-five years old and could easily relate to matters of importance to these students that ranged in age from 14-21. They experienced living situations which varied from living in single parent homes, in homes where there was an absence of the father, in alternative settings with grandparents or other family members, and even in some cases were homeless.

While working in the high school setting, the researcher observed an extensive number of the problems African American males encountered during this transitional year. These young men made a great deal of mistakes, academically as well as

behaviorally, ultimately resulting in a high number of repeating ninth graders. He has seen as many as one-third of the freshman class represented by repeaters that have failed their freshman year two and in some cases three times.

The researcher's initial year as an administrator was in an alternative school setting dealing with students that were academically behind in grade level and that worked to catch up their credits and return to their home school and right grade or graduate through the program. The student body was represented by well over fifty percent African American males who were often 2 to 3 grade levels behind. A structure was created to simulate a freshman academy for those students that were new to the high school environment; unfortunately, the researcher was reassigned to another school the following year before getting it fully operational. Progress was made in identifying the characteristics of the teachers needed to work in those roles, the method of instruction that would need to be used with the students and a focus on the social development that would need to be addressed through building relationships with the students.

The researcher was also provided the opportunity to work in a high school setting that was not of low socioeconomic status. In comparison, the students in this environment already had the basic needs met in their lives as well as an appropriate support system. The demographics of the environment were diverse as compared to that in most low socioeconomic environments providing for cultural and climate differences and better opportunities for advancement. Therefore, such structures as a freshman academy could apply, but were unnecessary as students were entering with the foundational and academic backgrounds to meet and fulfil educational obligations.

In preparing for this dissertation, the researcher reflected on his experiences in the educational setting and evaluated the need and importance to conduct research on the inadequacies faced by many African American males. The researcher felt as though he could share his personal experiences for the purpose of making a difference in the outcomes of their success. The young men encountered throughout this educational experience as a teacher and administrator, believed in the researcher because he always tried to establish a relationship and serve as an example in which they could see that there were options and opportunities.

This topic has not been thoroughly examined providing a need for deeper and more meaningful understanding of the needs of this population by administrators in order to develop an alternative for success. Data from this study could influence the thought process of those making these decisions that directly impacted the academic structure in which African American males were taught.

Freshman academies were not solely for the benefit of African American males, but to serve the same purpose for all students. The focus of the research, however, looks at how this intervention could provide them the necessary support systems needed to increase their academic achievement during their freshman year of high school.

Reporting of Results

The results of this qualitative research study will be reported in Chapter IV. The chapter will contain information about the administrators that participated as well as the participants interview questions. Results from the interview will be reported. Coded patterns, common themes, and explanations of existing relationships identified from the interviews that were conducted will be provided.

Summary

In the chapter the researcher proposed to describe the research methodology of the study, explain the population and sampling plan of the study, to identify the instruments used to collect data, and to explain the procedures followed for conducting research. In addition, strategies identifying means of establishing validity and reliability for the study have been included. Lastly, the chapter states the appropriate protocols for protecting human subjects as suggested by the Institutional Review Board.

CHAPTER FOUR: Qualitative Review Analysis Findings

Overview

Chapter four presents data on the perception of administrators about their understanding of the purpose of the freshman academy, the issues affecting African American males specifically during the transition to a freshman academy, and perceptions of the freshman academy administrator on the extent to which the ninth grade academy was successful for these participants. The qualitative researcher conducted interviews with ninth grade academy administrators to obtain information and data regarding relationships and obtain evidence to provide insight of the success of ninth grade academies (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Coding and content analysis was used to complete the analysis for this qualitative study. Prior to collecting any data, permission was sought and approved, and a pilot study was conducted to review the clarity of the questions, the ease of comprehension, and establish potential time frames for answering the questions.

This study consisted of four semi-structured interviews with five administrators from four districts located with the central and south west regions of the state of Georgia. Two districts were rural consisting of one main high school and two were from larger urban district where multiple high schools were located. Demographic data was captured from each administrator. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and were analyzed through a process of coding and content analysis.

The following sections presented an overview of the research questions and design. A demographic description of each school and the administrators from each

school in this study were summarized. Next, the findings for each research questioning were categorized and summarized. The overarching research questions were answered for each supporting research question based on the findings.

Data Collection

The Institutional Review Board of Columbus State University and the superintendent of each of the district granted permission to conduct this qualitative research study. They were all informed of the purpose and assured of their ability to withdraw from the interview at any time. Participants were granted anonymity for their agreement to participate in this study.

All interviewees were given consent letters and interview procedures were explained; all respondents agreeing to interviews were assured of confidentiality and were given a code to ensure confidentiality. Each administrator volunteered to participate in the study. Interviewees were offered copies of the transcript to review for corrections or comments. All data was kept confidential.

Credibility

Credibility of the researcher's initial understanding was recognized by determining if the research findings were believable (Anney, 2014).The researcher used triangulation, peer debriefing and audit trail to establish rigor in the study. Triangulation was used to minimize researcher bias and reexamined the reliability of participants' answers (Anney, 2014). The research in this study used the perspectives of the administrators interviewed, the researcher's own perceptions, and perceptions obtained through review of the literature. According to Guba (1981), peer debriefing "provides

inquirers with the opportunity to test their growing insights and to expose themselves to searching questions" (p. 85). In this manner, the researcher reached out to members of the dissertation committee, graduate level colleagues and educators that were familiar with the freshman academy environment for support and feedback (Anney, 2014). By the researcher also performing an audit trail, confirmability was established. The researcher maintained a coding log which established how decisions were made and maintained records of the process, showing that it was done the same way over and over again to create the same results, thus establishing validity and accuracy of the data. The researcher kept record of the recorded interview, printed interview transcript documents and the data codes. These items are required for an auditor to conduct a thorough audit trail and to cross check information (Anney, 2014).

Demographic Data

Administrators participating in this study included two principals and three assistant principals from these selected schools. The administrators in this study were between the ages of 36 to 57. Both of the principals were white males that ranged in age from 37 to 51. Two of the three assistant principals were white, one male and one female. The third assistant principal was an African American female. All principals were in a school configured with a ninth grade academy. One administrator had between 10 to 15 years administrative experience, 3 had between 5 to 10 years of administrative experience, and one administrator had less than 5 years of administrative experience. Two administrators have served in their ninth grade academy for 3-5 years while the other three has worked with them for 3 years or less. Table 17 provides a demographic

description of the administrators' participating in this study as well as indicates the length of time in their current role and experience as an administrator.

Table 17: Demographic Information

School	Age	Race	Gender	Years in Administration	Years in Freshman Academy
1	51	W	M	13	2
2	52	B	F	8	4
3	37	W	M	5	2
4	38	W	M	5	3
5	56	W	F	2	1

Overall, fifteen districts were solicited with a total of 20 school sought containing freshman academies were sought to participate in the study. The superintendent of 15 districts were mailed letters requesting their permission to conduct research in their districts. At the requested return date 5 districts had responded, 3 requesting additional documentation for their IRB approval process, 2 chose not to participate. A second round of letters was mailed to the non-responding districts. The second attempt yielded 2 approvals. Phone calls were then made to each district which had not responded. The researcher was able to speak to only one superintendent whom expressed their inability to participate. Four voice messages were left with no further response from any of those schools.

Out of six approved districts, four districts participated with a total of four interviews with five administrators. Upon receiving approval, principals of the identified schools were contacted via email with a letter informing them of the purpose of the study, approval by the district and a request for permission to speak to them and a respective staff member. Approved school sites were scheduled and interviews completed.

The interviews were conducted and transcribed over a 6 week period. Interviews with administrators in four different districts were conducted within the central and south west regions in Georgia. Two schools represented were from rural areas, and two were from urban districts in the state. Each school had a ninth grade academy with different configurations. Two schools shared similar arrangements which were structured in separate buildings with total isolation from high school with the exception of some shared teachers and extracurricular activities. Two schools had a "school with in a school" structure with students contained for area core classes only but then integrated for the academic classes.

Coding

Interview questions and responses were categorized in response to the aligned research question which focused on (1) distinguishing roles and purpose of freshman academies (2) perceptions of effective practices to combat the academic challenges of African American males and the implementation of the freshman academy (3) evidence to identify success or failure of the freshman academy for African American male (4) issues of African American males targeted by freshman academy administrators during the transitory year (5) if freshmen academies are successful.

Research Question 1:

According to administrators, what is the distinguishing role and purpose of freshman academies?

Themes which emerged from the coding of Research Question 1 included (1) relationship; (2) basic needs; (3) routines and procedures; (4) early intervention; (5) staff support; (6) instructional practices; and (7) successful undertakings.

Research Question 2:

What is their perception of effective instructional practice to combat the academic challenges of African American freshman males and the implementation of freshman academy?

Research Question two codes included (1) environmental factors; (2) staff development; (3) effective teaching and accountability; (4) enrichment; and (5) teacher selection.

Research Question 3:

What evidence have administrators sought to help them understand success or failure of the freshman academy with African American males? How was it used?

Research question number three codes included (1) academic achievement; (2) attendance; (3) discipline; and (4) parent and student perception.

Research Question 4:

What issues affecting the African American male during this transitory year are administrators of freshman academies targeting and why?

Research Question number four codes were (1) immaturity; (2) environmental issues; (3) middle school background; (4) academic struggles; (5) intimidation; and (6) school climate.

Research Question 5:

Are freshman academies a successful intervention? Why or why not?

Finally, codes that emerged for research question five reflected (1) stronger academic foundation; (2) creating positive relationships; (3) setting expectations; and (4) early intervention.

Initially charts were created identifying each research question/category. Interview questions were read and reread to determine appropriate alignment to address research questions. Interview responses were included under multiple research questions dependent upon the context of the answer. Finally, responses were coded to identify emerging themes. As themes emerged the list was reviewed to combine and compile data. Once the list was narrowed to four themes, the researcher moved forward with creating an electronic data file.

Research Question 1

The administrators that participated in this study did not give a well-defined answer detailing the exact role and purpose of freshman academies; however, through their responses, they described their perspective of the degree to which relationships contribute to the significance of freshman academies

Interviewees revealed (1) relationships, (2) basic needs, (3) routines and procedures and (4) early intervention were the four most important themes to emerge in

relation for research question number one. However, staff support, instructional practices, and successful undertakings were also reported by more than one interviewee; one interviewee said discipline was also important.

Relationships

One of the interviewees expressed, “The freshman academy setting creates a family unit for the student which enables relationships which will follow the student throughout high school and potentially the rest of their lives.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.5)

Interviewees acknowledged the importance of knowing the students and establishing relationships with them early during the school year. As emphasized by one interviewee, “Once the foundation for a relationship has been established, students were forever respectful of the relationship and connected to me because I listened and supported them." (Administrator 2, 2015, P. 8)

Another interviewee also commented that he valued the family concept as he told his students “I’ve got 3000 plus that are mine” indicating that “I treat everyone in this building as if they are family from student to faculty and staff seeking the family filled atmosphere. (Administrator 3, 2015, p.15)

Other interviewees felt the small learning environment contributed to the ability, p.to get to know the students better building a stronger relationship because you were more confined and often spent more direct time with the students who might be in trouble. (Administrator 4, 5)

In addition interviewees commented that because of such tight facilities, it provides an opportunity for more eyes to be on the students including lunch, office, and custodial staff members. (Administrator 4, 5)

One interviewee disclosed, “Many students come to school looking for positive relationships because many of them don’t have positive male role models and are being raised by their mothers and grandmothers and most of their influence comes from members of the neighborhood that probably should not be considered a role model.” (Administrator 4)

Basic Needs

In order to ensure student needs are met, administrators often wear many hats to include acting as the school nurse, counselor, custodian as well as maintain their role as administrator and instructional leader. (Administrator 1, 3)

One interviewee explained how important it was to make sure you were visible to the students and that you visually evaluated the student to make sure they were all right. “I like to be out there to speak to them when they get off the bus, make eye contact, visually see them in the event something gets my attention that is may or may not be a good day in effort of trying to get him or her in early to try to make the day a little better.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.3)

Another interviewee stated, “Celebrating and fellowshipping with the students and teachers was beneficial in showing recognition to students for their efforts and accomplishments. (Administrator 2, 2015, p.12)

This interviewee also expressed, “It is a necessity to be available for students and parents to address problems or concerns they may be having.” (Administrator 2, 2015, p.8)

“When dealing with students that are of a low socioeconomic status, they had to have trust first.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p.23).

Another interviewee described the need for students to feel safe. “A safe environment eliminates the intimidation factor often felt by ninth graders fearing being threatened or bullied and beaten by upperclassmen.” (Administrator 4, 2015, p.12)

Early Interventions

Each of the interviewees recognized that freshman academies provided for the opportunity to acknowledge and intervene in areas that support the immediate social, personal and academic needs of students.

Administrators have tackled this area of deficiency by:

- Utilizing outside mentors
- Identifying potential male role models on staff
- Bringing in guest speakers
- Building personal connections with students
- Offering supplemental instructional time focused on academic remediation
- Increased parent involvement
- Scheduling weekly student and parent meetings to review grades, missing assignments, behavior etc.

Staff Support

Placement of the right staff is significant in achieving the goal and purpose of freshman academies. According to the interviewees, having teachers in your freshman academy that have a desire to be there is a very important thing. (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)

One interviewee stated, “Teachers on my campus knew what they were getting into when they made the choice to come to the freshman campus.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.11)

Another interviewee indicated, “Necessary characteristics for teachers to fit the ninth grade academy models requires them to have the right personality, be flexible, and have the patience to work with students when they make mistakes.” (Administrator 2, 2015, p.4)

Administrator number three articulated the importance of having individuals that understand and have done well with the ninth grade curriculum; that will buy into and align with the vision of the school as well as being committed to the school limiting the amount of teacher turnover in the building. (Administrator 3)

In addition to the need for strong teachers wanting to be in the freshman academy, other interviewees summarized the other’s comments by saying if all these other things line up the results of the teachers work will show. (Administrator 4, 5)

Instructional Practices

Interviewees expressed the need for classroom instruction to engage and limit distractions. (Administrator 1). Instructional practices should be cutting edge and reflective of 21st century instructional practices:

- Very little lecture and general note taking
- Technology driven activities
- Use of smart board, interactive white boards, i-pads and computers
- Project based learning
- Use of online resources, curriculum sites

Interviewees further illustrated how personality impacted instruction by making a comparison of how two different teachers using different methods achieved the same results. This interviewee said, “I can walk down the hall and there is a teacher that maybe louder and more boisterous with the students; Seeming like war was being conducted in the classroom. Then on the other hall, there is a teacher that is a little more laid back, that plays soft music in the background to appeal to the students’ other senses. Bottom line, despite the difference, test scores were reflective of learning in both classroom settings, both were student centered and they both utilized project based learning classroom models which represents students learning and growing in those classes.” (Administrator 4, 2015, p.22)

Another interviewee shared that his emphasis was seeking feedback identified through a student diagnostic testing that had been given with the objective of moving forward and tailoring the instructional practices appropriately. “The emphasis right now is on unpacking the standards, identifying the power standards, using table specifications from all the assessments, making sure the power standards are aligned to those, and then having teachers after that start with the process of going back, identifying whether they have common assessments in place. If they don’t, let’s work on getting them in place and

then look at what instructional strategies are you using within your classrooms." (Administrator 3, 2015, p.14)

Routines and Procedures

Each administrator said a significant role of their job was to transition these students into this new ninth grade setting. (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)

One interviewee stated, "The teachers and myself would stand outdoors and in the hallways to show visibility, to push kids along, in order to create expectations and standards. Providing structure promotes the discipline behavior model expected." (Administrator 2, 2015, p.6)

Another interviewee implemented a transitional phase in which he and the faculty began with a more controlled approach that was familiar to the students then progressively transitioned them into normal procedures and routines. (Administrator 3)

Administrator four and five place their attention on meeting student needs by using a transitional ninth grade study skills course to focus on academic deficiencies. (Administrator 4, 5)

"I think we thought that was what it was going to be too and as time, not having association with the older students, they still acted like they were in middle school and so we started integrating classes. We have teachers now in the main building teaching ninth graders and so our ninth graders are back and forth between the buildings that's primarily ninth grade and vice versa. We don't have a true ninth grade academy anymore. The maturity level…. between seniors and ninth graders is night and day." (Administrator 4, 2015, p.2)

Successful Interventions

An interviewee acknowledged as a program success “We didn't have any African American males that made it to the point where they were habitual offenders, or that wound up going before tribunal to be placed in the alternative school”. (Administrator 1, 2015, p.6)

Another interviewee remarked that they had a lot of African American young men who have gone over this year to the high school, especially the ones who are actively involved in extra-curricular but specifies that one made tremendous improvement. “I had a young man last year. He was in football but he just wasn’t maturing like he was supposed to in the classroom and even with football. Now this year, with football, he’s taking a leadership role. He’s actually won the actual captain’s bullet team. He leads not just by what he says. He’s leading by example. I’ve seen a total change in him, but that’s also taking not just the Ninth Grade Academy to do that. It’s also taken the influence of the high school administrators and faculty and staff to help that transition from here to there to also mold in that piece.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p.18)

Research Question 2

Interviews conducted by the researcher further revealed that environmental factors, staff development, effective teaching and accountability, and enrichment were the key themes that emerged in relation to research question number two. In addition, teacher selection was also cited by more than one administrator as being important practices.

Environmental Factors

Each interviewee pointed out practices that recognized the importance of the environmental factors in connection to accountability measures being in place that stimulated teacher proficiency for effectively facilitating the necessary learning objectives.

In addressing the environmental structure of the freshman academy, an interviewee explained, “This setting is being best suited for ninth graders because it isolates from the distractions encountered in the large overcrowded facility and does not require them to live up to someone else’s expectations or impress anyone else.” (Administrator 2, 2015, p.9)

According to one interviewee, “When they are in the mainstream with everyone else, you will see a different kid. They are trying hard to fit in and are like sponges and the older guys are always trying to prey on the younger girls”. Although their ninth graders are only separated for content area courses, administrator two felt that faculty and staff had such a hands-on approach that academy kids were not as greatly influenced by the upperclassmen. (Administrator 2, 2015, p.9)

Another interviewee in a ninth grade only setting but acknowledged pros and cons to both setups. He endorsed the separate setting as an opportunity for students to focus just on high school and acquiring credits during ninth grade year and deterring drop out, however, he felt the interaction gained from being with the older students through such courses as CTAE and other electives was a missing component in molding the students which often created an additional transition the following year. “To me if we take out ninth graders and you still keep them in a certain area to develop them in a system but then add the extra component with the assistance of the older students along with it, it

will speed up their maturity and it would make an even faster transition completely into high school a lot easier that just on your own in one individual site". (Administrator 3, 2015, p.22)

Other interviewees that operated in a separate onsite building also applauded the advantages of the freshman academy but also felt "the natural integration with the older students modeled how to behave and act. Having them in the smaller environments help monitor them better, but at the same time, they don't have the role models that show them. Coming from middle schools, they have such little freedom socially and all then when they get here and nobody's walking them to class, when the bell rings and they can just get up and go and nobody walks them to lunch and tells them where to sit, they have difficulty adjusting". (Administrator 5, 2015, p.4)

Staff Development

With having the right structures in place, administrators feel it is important that teacher be informed and aware of how to best deal with students of different cultures, backgrounds, and learning abilities. Interviewees agreed that making sure teachers had the appropriate mindset was critical (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4).

One interviewee insisted that their goal was getting teachers to buy in getting consistency across all classrooms and for them to realize that "failure was not an option." (Administrator 2, 2015, p.10)

- Administrators use faculty meeting time as time for professional learning. (Administrator 1)
- Administrators also utilize consultants and guest speakers to reinforce these efforts. (Administrator 4)

- Book studies: How to motivate African American males, personal conversations and discussions on diversity, building relationships, getting to know students, and staff presentations. (Administrator 3)
- Study groups, weekly collaborative planning with academic coaches. (Administrator 2)

Another interviewee asserted "they're still under the same mindset that I could still do the same things but you can't because that's what got us to where we are at. Albert Einstein says it best, if you keep doing the same things over and over, expecting different results, and its insanity." (Administrator 3, 2015, p.20)

Effective Teaching and Accountability

Administrator's must hold teachers accountable for providing instruction that interest and engage students because they are 21st century learners (Administrators 1, 3). These practices must be reflective of learning needs as well as provide effective instruction. Interviewees identify the following as common practices for effective instructions.

- Use of diagnostic assessments: common assessments
- Redirected instruction: group based on need
- Standards based educational framework
- Unpacking standards and identification of power standards
- Project based learning
- Technology integration; online textbook, smart boards, interactive media

In order to impose accountability measures, interviewees have the responsibility of being data driven creatures by use of test scores, TKE's teacher evaluations and feedback, and student surveys to evaluate teacher performance.

All administrators did however acknowledge that constant changes in state curriculum and standardized assessment will drastically create a decreasing effect of their scores and CCRPI reports for the next year. They did not provide current data because last year's performance has not been released from the state reflective of those changes. (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)

Teacher Selection

Another aspect noted as important by the administrators was the selection of teachers in the Freshman Academy as a matter of combatting academic challenges. Differences existed as to how staff was selected, in some instances staff was already in place when the administrator was assigned to the Freshman Academy. (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)

One interviewee stated, "The process was opened up to volunteers and then the list was discussed to determine who would be the right fit to teach the freshman based on ability and compatibility." (Administrator 2, 2015, p.4)

Other administrators also provided similar responses that focused on finding a quality person that jelled best with the direction they wanted to take the students in and that overall decided to come to work in the Freshman Academy because they wanted to be there. (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)

Enrichment

In order to motivate and engage students, it was necessary to provide opportunities that will engage and further develop them in not only academics but also personally and socially.

Another interviewee added, “Our theme this year was to rise up to lead, learn and love. Each day I get on the intercom in the morning and in the afternoon I remind them about what it means to be a leader? What does it mean to be a lifelong learner and then what does it mean to grow, to love others not just in out building but in our community”! (Administrator 3, 2015, p.15).

Administrators described numerous activities to aid in and address the overall development of the students:

- Freshman Summer Camp (Administrator 2)
- Mentoring (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)
- Ninth Grade Study Skill (Administrator1, 4)
- Extended Learning Time (Administrator 1, 3)
- Student Advisement Period (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)
- PBIS-Positive Behavior Intervention & Support (Administrator 4)
- Character Education (Administrator 4)
- Ninth Grade Student Sports, Clubs and organizations. (Administrator 1,2, 3, 4)

Research Question 3

The most significant and relevant themes focused on academic achievement, attendance, discipline and parent student and community perception.

Academic Achievement

One interviewee reported, “Achievement data was pretty consistent with the state average with the exception of math, which is significantly low due to several state driven math curriculum changes over the past five years. For achievement purposes, ninth grade was measured based on end of course tests in the areas of Math, English and Science.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.9)

According to another interviewee, after the freshman academy was implemented, they saw increased test scores each year following, including the year it began. (Administrator 2)

Another interviewee reported, “ELA over the past five years, the trend has been from 70 to 75 or stayed in that area and we’re stagnant. There’s really not been a whole lot of growth. If anything, the data is trending right now. It’s showing a decrease. Whereas, the biology, that changed in the curriculum. The way we set it up made that huge drop. We dropped, you can say 50% in points. Mathematics though is our weakest area, five-year trend … Let’s say five years ago, we were teaching Math 1. Students were passing at a rate of 45%. The next year, same score, 45%. The very next year, we changed [the] curriculum. Now we’re doing core and algebra. First year implementation, we scored 19% students passing. Next year, 21% students were passing. There’s growth. Teachers are beginning to understand the curriculum, so that means now the students are going and start beginning to understand the curriculum.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p.12)

Interviewees from another district did not report their data, only indicated that it was not good in mathematics, but that English and Science had done relatively well. (Administrator 4)

Tables 18 through 21 contains academic assessment data belonging to ninth grade African American males reported for each administrator's school. The date spans over a three year period in the three academic content areas that they are measured for growth.

Table 18: Assessment Report for School District/Administrator 1

School District/ Administrator 1	EOCT Pass/Failure Rates reported for 9th Grade African American Males		
Year	Course	Does Not Meet	Meets/Exceeds
2014	Ninth Grade Lit	8.8	91.2
2013	Ninth Grade Lit	17.2	82.8
2012	Ninth Grade Lit	24.7	75.3
2014	Biology	0	100.0
2013	Biology	12.5	87.5
2012	Biology	39.4	60.6
2013	CCGPS	73.1	26.9
2014	Coordinate Algebra	72.5	27.5
2012	Math 1	28.1	71.9

Table 19: Assessment Report for School District/Administrator

School District/ Administrator 2	EOCT Pass/Failure Rates reported for 9th Grade African American Males		
Year	Course	Does Not Meet	Meets/Exceeds
2014	Ninth Grade Lit	5.1	94.9
2013	Ninth Grade Lit	46.8	53.2
2012	Ninth Grade Lit	38.6	61.4
2014	Coordinate Algebra	76.5	23.5
2013	CCGPS	79.8	20.3
2012	Algebra	55.1	44.9
2014	Biology	21.4	78.6
2013	Biology	28.6	71.4

School District/ Administrator 2	EOCT Pass/Failure Rates reported for 9th Grade African American Males		
2012	Physical Science	47.0	53.0

Table 20: Assessment Report for School District/Administrator 3

School District/ Administrator 3	EOCT Pass/Failure Rates reported for 9th Grade African American Males		
Year	Course	Does Not Meet	Meets/Exceeds
2014	Ninth Grade Lit	32.3	67.7
2013	Ninth Grade Lit	31.6	68.4
2012	Ninth Grade Lit	28.4	71.6
2014	Biology	59.4	40.6
2013	Biology	15.5	84.5
2012	Biology	23.6	76.4
2012	Physical Science	47.0	53.0
2013	CCGPS	82.7	17.4
2014	Coordinate Algebra	81.9	18.1
2012	Math 1	54.8	45.2

Table 21: Assessment Report for School District/Administrator 4

School District/ Administrator 4	EOCT Pass/Failure Rates reported for 9th Grade African American Males		
Year	Course	Fail	Meets/Exceeds
2014	Ninth Grade Lit	20.6	79.4
2013	Ninth Grade Lit	34.8	65.2
2012	Ninth Grade Lit	21.6	78.4
2014	Biology	42.7	57.3
2013	Biology	49.0	50.9
2012	Biology	46.4	53.6
2014	Coordinate Algebra	78.5	21.6
2013	CCGPS	84.5	15.6
2012	Math 1	51.9	48.1

Attendance

In regards to attendance, one administrator reported, “Before the establishment of the freshman academy, the dropout and retention rate surpassed that of any other grade level. In many cases there were a lot that just did not come to school.” (Administrator 2, 2015, p.1)

A different interviewee describes it as a hardship and indicated that, “If students miss class for even a day in ISS, it counts against CCRPI due to the tie between absences and academic achievement and the fact that when a student misses school they have missed a learning opportunity.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.17)

Another interviewee stated, “There has been a significant increase in the graduation rate. When the freshman academy was implemented in 2004 there was an average graduation rate around 60%. Over the past couple of years the graduation rate increased to about 88%. In-house figures for last year estimate to be around 88% again, official data has not been released. Our data shows that despite our setup, when we do lose our students, as far as drop outs, it’s not in the freshman year, It’s actually tenth grade year when they lose them.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p.2)

One other interviewee reported retention rate as being better, but did not disclose any data at the time of the interview. (Administrator 4)

Tables 22 through 25 contain attendance data of African American male students attending the freshman academies studied in his research. The date spans over a three year period, including a three year average to reflect the percentage of absences occurring among this group of students.

Table 22: Absence Report for School District/Administrator 1

School District/ Administrator 1	Percentage of Absences reported of Ninth Grade African American Males			
Year(s)	Zero Absences	1 to 5 Absences	6 to 10 Absences	>10 Absences
2013-2015 Avg.	13.4	56.7	22.3	7.6
2015	14.3	60.7	23.2	1.8
2014	20.0	52.7	16.4	10.9
2013	4.4	56.5	28.3	10.9

Table 23: Absence Report for School District/Administrator 2

School District/ Administrator 2	Percentage of Absences reported of Ninth Grade African American Males			
Year(s)	Zero Absences	1 to 5 Absences	6 to 10 Absences	>10 Absences
2013-2015 Avg.	8.1	36.0	15.3	40.5
2015	6.9	41.7	12.5	38.9
2014	10.1	37.7	18.8	33.3
2013	7.4	29.6	14.8	48.2

Table 24: Absence Report for School District/Administrator 3

School District/ Administrator 3	Percentage of Absences reported of Ninth Grade African American Males			
Year(s)	Zero Absences	1 to 5 Absences	6 to 10 Absences	>10 Absences
2013-2015 Avg.	15.5	46.1	22.4	16.0
2015	10.4	48.8	24.0	16.8
2014	18.2	45.5	25.5	10.9
2013	18.1	44.1	18.1	19.7

Table 25: Absence Report for School District/Administrator 1

School District/ Administrator 4	Percentage of Absences reported of Ninth Grade African American Males			
Year(s)	Zero Absences	1 to 5 Absences	6 to 10 Absences	>10 Absences
2013-2015 Avg.	14.6	48.7	20.4	16.4
2015	13.0	58.7	15.6	13.0

School District/ Administrator 4	Percentage of Absences reported of Ninth Grade African American Males			
2014	17.0	39.6	26.6	16.9
2013	13.1	50.4	17.5	18.9

Discipline

According to one interviewee, “While I worked within the district prior to working in the freshman academy, I recalled seeing elevated numbers of disciplinary issues that transpired with ninth grade students. Since becoming the freshman academy administrator, I have changed some things to simply the discipline process. For example, use of a behavioral plan reduced the number of discipline referrals that often lead to suspensions and ultimately tribunals with the school board. They were held to permanently remove students from school or place them in an alternative school setting. Instead, we worked to strategically place high profile students that might have had extensive behavioral backgrounds.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.13)

One interviewee, although strict on enforcement of school rules and policy was very flexible in trying to meet district initiatives of lowering the number of out of school suspensions by holding kids in ISS, providing morning detention when aware of transportation issues preventing them from staying, “Whatever we had to do to keep them in school, and to discipline during the day, we had to be creative”. (Administrator 2, 2015, p.7)

This same interviewee established expectations and consequences students readily adhered to in most situations. For instance, “Kids before they walked in the door, they knew that I would be there or somewhere near, and the students would take ear buds off,

pull up their pants, get rid of food, and stop all the cussing." (Administrator 2, 2015, p.10)

Administrator five acknowledged, "We piloted PBIS in ninth grade academy last year and saw positive effects with a dip in discipline effects from middle school to ninth grade. Ironically, for the last couple years, we have seen a greater rise in disciple referrals as ninth graders transitioned to tenth grade." (Administrator 5, 2015, p.4)

Student, Parent, Community Perception

Interviewees reported minimal-to-no-concern regarding the initial establishment of Freshman Academies in their district, Administrator one stated there were concerns about students missing part of their high school experience and still having the connection and affiliation." (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)

One interviewee emphasized, "Considering the fact that the students are not on the main campus, we still try to make sure students have a very active freshman year. Although students did not recognize it immediately, they realized that it was a good setup once they entered the mainstream high school." (Administrator 1, 2015, p.10)

Another interviewee stated, "There was hesitation by teachers and parents in the community was not because of set up but more so because of the facility in which they were relocated. It's a perception that people have built over the years that this is a bad place to be, but really not since the move parents and teachers alone feel 10 times better about it being located right in the heart of the city. Students were met with territorial notions because it had previously been their building as middle school and now other students from the north end of town were designated to join their as ninth grades since the

building had been repurposed as the freshman academy building. “All in having to change the culture and mindset.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p. 20)

One other administrator reported, “The freshman academy is a security blanket for many of those parents coming from middle school that were not quite ready to let go. Parents are very visible and actively take on more of a hands-on approach than usual. Students, however, come in scared to death. Their perception of the high school was that the seniors were going to put them in trash cans and beat them up and other stuff.” (Administrator 5, p.17)

Research Question 4

Interviews conducted by the researcher revealed that immaturity, environmental issues, middle school background, and academic struggles were key themes that emerged as issues affecting African American males. Intimidation and school climate were also important factors that two of the participating administrators identified.

Immaturity

One of the interviewees commented, “Immaturity should be targeted because ninth graders are not ready for the high school life and pressures, as evidenced in the high school failure rate among ninth graders. This immaturity should be targeted as a means to develop them so they will be ready when they get there.” (Administrator 2, 2015, p.1)

Another interviewee stated, “Ninth graders are immature as a result of them being lost and unable to handle the balance causing a struggle with their attendance, behavior, and academics.” (Administrator 2, p.1)

Along the same lines, a different interviewee explained the immaturity of ninth graders to be because they were still in middle school mindsets. He said “young men do not mature as quickly as young ladies and would like to implement mentoring programs to determine if they can increase the rate at which they mature”. (Administrator 3, 2015, p.18)

Other interviewees portrayed ninth graders’ inefficiencies with adjusting to high school as being a result of having no role models to show them how to behave and act. (Administrator 4, 5)

Environmental Factors

As depicted by one of the interviewees, “It is our responsibility to create an environment where students do not have to be located in overcrowded buildings, where they were crammed in the halls and classes; where the underclassmen female were not prey to the overaged male, and where they would be sheltered from seeing other disturbing occurrences that might have taken place.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.10)

One interviewee said, “Ninth grade students should be given a structure without too many freedoms in the sense that they end up back lost and unaccountable.” (Administrator 2, 2015, p.2)

Another interviewee asserted, “Low socioeconomic status has a significant impact on student development as parents are deficient in the abilities necessary to keep their child on track and from falling behind in prerequisite skills for course areas.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p.20)

One other interviewee insisted, “Home life is a contributing factor, which concerns administrators because many parents lack parenting skills and do not govern their children.” (Administrator 4, 2015, p.18)

Middle School Background

One of the administrators acknowledged, “In order to be effective in creating a safe environment, I have to be conscious of major issues that a student has been involved with that could potentially cause future issues in the school setting.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.3)

An interviewee stated, “If students had problems in middle school, the same problems whether attendance, academics, or discipline would carry over to the ninth grade. (Administrator 2, 2015, p.16)

Interviewees often encountered students being moved up to the ninth grade from middle school that are not only overaged, but also academically deficient. (Administrator 3)

One interviewee recognized that ninth graders programmed from being in a structured environment lack ability to function independently without cues from following the lead of upperclassmen. (Administrator 4)

Academic Struggle

An interviewee indicated, “Over 70% of ninth grade students passed without failing any classes resulting in 30% failing at least one class, not so much because of instruction, but due to goofing off and not taking care of business. (Administrator 1, 2015 p.2)

Another interviewee addressed the importance of discipline and attendance. “Discipline and attendance are major issues that have direct impact on the academic achievement of students that needs to be settled in order to encourage achievement in ninth grade.” (Administrator 2, 2015, p.1)

One interviewee pointed out, “Parents, often, contribute to ninth grade student academic negligence because they do not take the time to learn the difference between high school and middle school policies and procedures such as attendance. For instance, attendance is no longer all day as in middle school; it is counted by each class period on the high school level.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p.20)

Other administrators posited that early academic issues were not only triggered by absences but also tardiness which had a direct impact on academic achievement. (Administrator 4, 5)

Other factors described as having contributed to academic struggles include:

- Intimidation and peer pressure for making good grades from (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)
- Greater class loads and responsibilities (Administrator 1, 2, 3, 4)
- Having to impress, live up to or show out to fit in with the crowd (Administrator 1, 2, 3)
- Being negatively influenced by upperclassmen and overage students (Administrator 1, 3)
- Fear of being bullied or harmed (Administrator 1, 2, 4)

Research Question 5

Interviewees revealed that stronger academic foundations, positive relationships, expectations, and early intervention were key themes that emerged as issues affecting African American males.

Stronger Academic Foundations

According to one interviewee, “By eliminating distractions and maintaining a Ninth Grade Academy structure, we created an atmosphere that allowed focus and commitment to academic achievement. (Administrator 1. 2015, p.5)

Another interviewee reported, “The first cohort made strides by establishing a precedence of raising the standard and maximizing the opportunity to challenge them following their experience in the Freshman Academy by taking advanced level courses. (Administrator 2, 2015, p.11)

One other interviewee described their facilitation of an actual transition. “Faculty and staff transitioned students from the dependent, structured state they knew and progressively equipped them to function independently. For example, they gradually moved students from being walked to the cafeteria as in the middle school setting, to allowing them to move there independently as in the high school setting.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p. 18)

Positive Relationships

One of the interviewees described, “Students are utilized by teachers in extended learning time to assist academically by peer tutoring and also to develop necessary socialization skills through collaborative learning. (Administrator 1, 2015, p.15)

Another interviewees expressed, “We have former students that are devoted to coming back and supporting initiatives that highlight benefits of the program to other interested students. (Administrator 2, 2015, p.5) We also create opportunities for African American male students, many from single parent homes, to receive mentors to further develop and facilitate connections and interactions geared toward creating positive changes in their lives.” (Administrator 2, 2015, p.14)

One interviewee took a different approach. “There was a situation in which we placed a male student with a female mentor due to the authority issues he had with females. The outcome was positive in redirecting the development of the young man toward the effort of getting him over his issue. I work with my staff and encourage them to build positive relationships and rapport in order to establish better connections and fill the gap these students often suffer from being in single parent homes.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p.19)

Other concerns addressed by interviewees was the importance of visibility as a means of creating a connection with students as well as making sure the relationships developed are positive ones. They reported having access to ten to fifteen mentors for the purpose of providing role models and building these relationships with African American male students in the school. (Administrator 4, 5)

Expectations

One interviewee contended, “While establishing expectations for the teacher to promote and educate students, I show my support by giving them what they need, supporting them, and letting them teach.” (Administrator 1, 2015, p.5)

Another interviewee pointed out using former students to promote the expectations of the freshman academy during a school visit, gives other students the opportunity to relate and recognize the compassion shown. (Administrator 2)

Other interviewees utilized consultant and guest speakers that shared a lot of her personal experience both as a teacher and a student for purpose of trying to help our teachers understand where our kids are coming from and some of the things that they are dealing with at home. (Administrator 4, 5)

Early Intervention

According to one interviewee, “The fact that we have one grade, allows us to focus on getting these kids started in high school without any distractions so they can focus on academics”. Extended learning time, also allotted time for focus to be placed on reaching graduation and looking at the things that kept students on track. (Administrator 1, 2015, p.5)

Another interviewee acknowledged the level of immaturity that ninth grade males exhibited and how it typically had taken until the end of the year for them to adjust; “He said he hoped that the empowerment program that they have put into place will help expedite that process allowing students to show greater signs of maturity sooner.” (Administrator 3, 2015, p.18)

One interviewee indicated, “Many of the males are from single parent homes with issues and without an actively involved father in their lives. Therefore, implementing a mentor program on the campus and making connections with these young men create positive and lasting effects that ultimately changed their lives. (Administrator 4 2015, p.18)

Overarching Research Question

To what extent have intervention strategies used by ninth grade academy administrators been successful with African American participants?

Overall, after analyzing all of the data, as the researcher, the effectiveness of the Freshman Academy was perceived to be positive. According to administrators interviewed for this study, the distinguishing role and purpose of freshman academies have been to create an environment that emphasized the importance of relationships as a means of support and encouragement. Through getting to know these young men, educators filled in the gap for African American males that might have had weak or a lack of positive role models. Administrators stated that the environment of the ninth grade academy should be conducive to learning through providing necessary attention in a separate setting, thus eliminating the distractions of the upperclassmen. Additionally, students needed the 21st century instruction by well-equipped and highly qualified teachers to combat academic challenges.

Administrators sought out the use of student data to include test scores, attendance data and discipline records as the evidence they need to prescribe the approach to effectively raise student achievement , increase attendance and decrease student referrals. The perceptions of students, teachers and parents took in consideration to generate the support for a positive outcome. Several of the administrators used data to provide remediation through their study skills classes or extended learning times.

Administrators targeted issues such as the immature nature of the student entering ninth grade, environmental factors inside the school as well as home life that might have affected their development, troubled middle school backgrounds that may have been high

in disciplinary action years of being taunted as overage learners, and academic struggles. In the opinions of the administrators interviewed, these factors seem to be highly influential determinants of increased failure rate for African American males in their freshman year. Because the Ninth Grade Academy embraced each of these specific aspects, the freshman academy has proven to be a successful intervention. The Ninth Grade Academy provided the opportunity to build stronger academic foundations to support students as they move on to higher grade levels and enrolled in advance level courses. It provided them a supportive environment that allowed them to build relationships and to recognize that someone cared about them. It created expectations which gave the student the boundaries and structure they needed to stay on purpose and focus.

Findings

Interview questions and responses were grouped in response to the aligned research question which focused on (1) distinguishing roles and purpose of freshman academies; (2) perceptions of effective practices to combat the academic challenges of African American males and the implementation of the freshman academy; (3) evidence to identify success or failure of the freshman academy for African American male; (4) issues of African American males targeted by freshman academy administrators during the transitory year; and (5) if freshmen academies are successful.

According to administrators, what is the distinguishing role and purpose of freshman academies?

The distinguishing role and purpose of the freshman academy was to build relationships. When sound relationships are in place, administrators have the capacity to

establish all of the other key components needed to provide a higher quality education. Each of the interviewees in the study pressed upon the idea that students were most responsive to the unified, family like atmosphere in the freshman academy setting. It was through this closeness that they were able to get to know the students and learn how to reach them, how to communicate with them, and how to save them.

In establishing relationships, interviewees described meeting student's basic needs. In each school environment, those basic needs consisted of different requirements, based on the population of the students being served. Needs range from the most essential of food, clothing and shelter requirements in one district to those involving the emotional esteem of the student with regards to their connection with someone on campus or the need for recognition. They also consist of desire to trust or feel relief from fear of endangerment.

Interviewees were able to access through their relationships areas that needed development. As expressed by interviewee number one, these deficiencies that are existent may be socially, personally or academically as a result of negligence in the student receiving the appropriate support at home, in a former school setting, or in their community. The interviewees in this study acknowledge freshman academies in this way are able to make provision through human resources and school instructional aides to progress students in all areas.

Teachers must be willing to build relationships. Ninth grade was the hardest grade level to work with because the students were immature and require a great deal of extra attention. According to interviewee two, not only would teachers for the freshman academy need to be proficient in their teaching area, but also they would have to have the

right mindset and personality to deal with the concerns of these entering ninth grade students. Other interviewees remarked that these teachers have to knowingly make the decision to be there (Administrator 1, 4, 5).

Instructional practices varied not only across districts but also across classrooms. Appropriate instructional strategies should be defined by the learning needs of the students but technically have been driven by the personality of the teacher. Interviewees expect instructional practices to align with assessment from which interviewees' measure teacher effectiveness.

Lastly, transition procedures varied by district. Each school had a different structure requiring different protocols be set. Freshman academies that were housed separately had no integration with upperclassmen requiring them to initiate more specific transitional procedures. Freshmen academies that were school within a school facility, on the other hand, utilized the upperclassmen only through elective courses to assist with a more eased transition.

What is their perception of effective instructional practice to combat the academic challenges of African American freshman males and the implementation of freshman academy?

Environmental structure, staff development, effective teaching and accountability, enrichment and teacher fit were the key themes that emerged from the data. Focus on environmental factors had a significant impact on combating the challenges of African American males as ninth grade students in the freshman academy. Along with isolation of ninth grade students for content area courses, it was a better option to integrate the students to some degree with upperclassmen, such as through elective courses and

extracurricular activities, for the purpose of better acclimating them to the processes and procedures of the high school environment.

Essentially, the environmental factors within the freshman academy should yield a cultivated staff capable of handling and identifying with the diversified culture and background accompanying students. It should also incorporate the necessary teaching practices that not only engage students in learning but also enrich them in their overall self-development.

What evidence have administrators sought to help them understand success or failure of the freshman academy with African American males? How was it used?

According to administrators, consistency with state targets for academic achievement and graduation rate decree the success of the freshman academy. Ninth grade end of course tests in Math, English and Language Arts, and Biology are the content areas used to measure growth in ninth grade. Attendance is monitored and associated to the dropout rate and achievement gap as communicated through graduation rate. If students are not at school, they are not learning. This association is linked to disciplinary infractions because interruptions in the learning environment are subject to affect others as well as result in absences and failing grades due to suspension.

What issues affecting the African American male during this transitory year are administrators of freshman academies targeting and why?

Administrator perceptions indicated influences that are responsible for increased failure rate are immaturity, environmental factors, middle school setbacks, and academic struggles. Students are not prepared for the shift to the high school setting and when they enter into this environment they do not take the changes seriously as well as lack the

knowledge of how to succeed and do better. They tend to be distracted by their fascination for the new surroundings and endeavors or from the fear of it. They are either lost in the overcrowded hallways and classrooms or overwhelmed with the freedom, which they cannot manage. Troubles at homes also carry over into the learning environment creating discourse in both settings as they deal with lack of accountability and low parental support. Some have an unfortunate history of academic struggles and failure, a high number of disciplinary infractions, and retention issues resulting in them being older than all of their classmates which sets preexistent barriers for student to have to succumb before moving forward. These factors are highly influential determinants of increased failure rate for African American males in their freshman year that administrators must rectify to enable their success as well as the success of the school.

Research Question 5

Are freshman academies a successful intervention? Why or why not?

Based on administrator perception, freshman academies are successful interventions. Data from interviews indicated freshman academies embraced the fundamental characteristics necessary to create a learning environment that adapts to the needs of the learner. Stronger academic foundations are formed because teachers are held accountable for ensuring that the appropriate instructional strategies are implemented that aligns with the curriculum and learning style of the student and should enable them to master content and progress to the higher level content. Measures are in place to identify their growth and academic development as well as enrichment programs to supplement any areas of deficiency.

The freshman academy provides a supportive environment that allows them to build relationships with their fellow students, teachers and administrators building a connection and support system which is there to recognize and eliminate anything that may be barriers to their fulfilling their academic goals. Additionally, expectations are set which gives the student the boundaries and structure they needed to stay on purpose and focus. Ninth graders are taught in an isolated environment to deter them from the interferences that manage to keep them off task but allowed enough interaction with the upperclassmen to heighten their social development and awareness.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to report the findings that emerged from the qualitative interviews conducted with Ninth Grade Academy administrators, which provided data from the perspectives of administrators of freshman academies.

Findings in the study reflected that the purpose of freshman academies was characterized as being an environment that supported relationships, basic needs, routines and procedures, early interventions, staff support, instructional practices, and successful undertakings. Effective instructional practices to address academic challenges included establishing appropriate environmental factors, staff development, effective teaching and accountability, enrichment and fit. Administrators targeted immaturity, environmental issues, middle school background, academic struggles, and school climate as issues affecting African American males during this transitory year. Lastly, findings showed that freshman academies were successful in accordance with building stronger academic foundations, creating positive relationships, setting expectations providing focus, and being an early intervention.

CHAPTER 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The transition to the larger, self-regulating high school environment was a significant shift for students leaving the more nurturing elementary and middle school setting (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). As a result, students dealt with being given a great deal of freedom without the necessary knowledge to effectively function in the high school environment (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). The purpose of this study was to identify the environmental factors, the methods of instruction, and the characteristics of social development that would need to be focused on in learning environments that embraced the nature of at-risk students and guided them into academic success. Freshman Academy administrators were interviewed to determine from their perspective if an intervention, such as a freshman academy, proved to be a beneficial strategy to promote the success of African American males during their freshman year of high school.

In chapter 1 of the study, the conditions that surround the issues encountered by African American males and how freshman academies created a support system for their academic stability and growth were identified and defined. The emphasis of this qualitative study was to interview a purposeful sample of freshman academy administrators to determine their perceptions through getting demographic data about the school structure and setting, operational issues of the academy, and the principal's perception of the freshman academy and its success as an intervention.

The literature review provided a background understanding of the specific obstacles which impacted the academic achievement of African American males. The literature gave relevance to strategies significant to bridging those achievement gaps and

explained research on the advantages of the freshman academy and meeting the challenges and implementing these practices were also examined in Chapter 2.

The research design and methodology was outlined in chapter 3. A qualitative approach was used to best describe the experiences encountered by Freshman Academy Administrators. School districts were purposefully selected that were identified as having freshman academies. A semi-structured interview protocol was used for this study that was developed by the researcher. Means of establishing validity and reliability were also executed.

The implementation of the methodology, data collection, analysis and results was defined in chapter 4. Demographic data of the participants and location of the study were also identified. Data from the qualitative interviews conducted were transcribed and interpreted through coding and content analysis. Lastly, findings were reported that disclosed the perceptions of freshman academy administrators.

Major Findings

1. Relationships were reported as being a significant factor in the success of the freshman academy and throughout the student's high school career, however, emphasis was never placed on how to prepare teachers to develop and maintain them.
2. Teachers are teaching according to the state curriculum, but will need to adapt to 21st century instructional strategies that will encourage engagement fitting to reach students at different academic levels and with specific learning needs.

3. The most predominant structure for freshman academies consisted of freshman being housed in a separately from other grade levels. Whereas half of the schools were solely isolated in separate buildings from the upperclassmen, the other half of the schools were school-within school settings. The prevailing view among administrators was that students needed some degree of integration with the upperclassmen to assist with their maturation and shift to independency.
4. Although all schools reported having professional development activities, training specific to the needs of teaching students of diverse cultures was not provided. Only one school reported having a book study that focused on how to deal with African American males.
5. Administrators reported improved attendance rate of students attending freshman academy, which contributed to higher graduation rates. In the freshman academy, it was easier to track and place a focus on the students that showed signs of failing or potentially dropping out.
6. Each freshman academy administrator provided evidence of incorporating a mentoring program into their freshman academy to come in and connect and serve as role models for their African American male students.

Discussion of the Findings

Research Question 1

According to administrators, what is the distinguishing role and purpose of freshman academies?

Remarks by administrators in this study indicated similarities in their perceptions of the role and purpose of freshman academies. Administrators implied that in some sense, the freshman academy was essentially centered on creating a relationship-oriented environment through which the students would be accommodated by an attentive staff with the necessary structure, social, emotional and educational supports, and engaging instructional practices. These findings supported previous research studies that specified relationships to be the foundation for learning in any classroom (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). Uwah et al. (2008) in their research more specifically emphasized the impact that relationships had in creating the sense of belonging that African American males needed to succeed in the learning environment. It was crucial to recognize that all students were not alike and that their needs often required different means of establishing social relationships with classmates and other individuals that provided them with encouragement and positive reinforcement (Lynley & Valerie, 2005). The ethnic makeup of the educational setting and varied learning styles and abilities dictated the design, the complexity, and the level of interaction used to reach the student academically. Klem and Connell (2004) further confirmed that as more African American males became more sustained in the process of setting achievement goals and establishing expectations, the probability of them completing the ninth grade and not dropping out of high school significantly increased.

Research Question 2

What is their perception of effective instructional practice to combat the academic challenges of African American freshman males and the implementation of freshman academy?

Administrators revealed through their perception of things that (1) environmental factors, (2) the manner in which staff was trained to deal with students, (3) the ability to identify effective teaching methods and have necessary accountability measures in place, (4) the ability to captivate the learner and maintain their engagement, and finally (5) the acknowledgment that a person has to have specific characteristics to work in the freshman academy environment to achieve all of the prior things mentioned, to ensure African American males overcame obstacles that stood in their way of being academically successful. Research by Letgers and Kerr (2001) best described the problem by acknowledging that, in most circumstances, high schools not were not prepared to deal with socially inept and academically deficient ninth graders.

According to research by Marsh, Chaney, and Jones (2012) negative factors further promoted opposition particularly with African American males showing academic improvement. In order for African American males to tackle these challenges they needed to be in environments where the teacher was concerned and supportive of students having similar objectives in order to feel self-assured to address these academic challenges in their way (Klem & Connell, 2004). This required the teacher to be the right fit, meaning having the personality and desire to support these students in reaching their full potential. Teachers must have undergone necessary professional development centered on the diversity of learners and be able to customize their teaching to distinguish various cultures, background, learning abilities not as a distraction but a reflection of their cultural behaviors (McDougal, 2009). Thus teaching practices were adapted accordingly to ensure students are engaged and comprehending (McDougal, 2009).

Research Question 3

What evidence have administrators sought to help them understand success or failure of the freshman academy with African American males? How was it used?

Administrators have used various measures to determine the success of African American males. By use of test scores, attendance data, and discipline records, administrators were able to track changes and monitor the effectiveness of intervention strategies to retain students According to Klem and Connell (2004), factors such as increased levels of engagement, increased attendance, and increased test scores were indicators of a decreased likelihood of students dropping out of school. Unfortunately, this data was also reflective of the achievement gap still existent between African American and White students (Ford & Moore, 2013).

Additionally administrators confirmed during the interviews, the ninth grade dropout rate surpasses that of all other grade levels (Administrator 1). Research by Barry and Reschly (2010) concluded that those numbers were significantly impacted resulting in a decline of the retention and dropout rate as a result of promoting student involvement and interaction through small learning communities. By creating this atmosphere, discipline issues were also minimized as males were given the opportunity to be more engaged and hands on, more ambitious to learn and refrained from modeling aggressive behavior usually resulting in a disciplinary infractions (Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013).

In most cases evidence was used to develop and provide extended learning opportunities for students that needed academic assistance. It was also used to provide supportive initiatives to reclaim students with increased tardiness and absences that were on the verge of becoming drop outs. As well, discipline data was used to create

alternative sanctions for discipline than suspending a kid and having them miss needed instructional time.

Research Question 4

What issues affecting the African American male during this transitory year are administrators of freshman academies targeting and why?

Administrators identified many factors as targets during this transitory year. These issues centered on immaturity of the student including, environmental issues from home as well as in school, circumstances that may have followed them from their previous middle school years, and academic struggles. Research supported that transitional shift encountered by students from the ninth grade impacted their comfort level reducing it to a state of uncertainty and high levels of anxiety (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The African American male students were not prepared to handle the level of responsibility that high school required of them to govern themselves. Interviewees referred to this as still having a middle school mindset. As these young adults matured, their emotional, social, and personal needs were frequently changing requiring academic stability that supported and accommodated their fluctuating interests (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). Sheppard (2009) further emphasized in his research that the educational environment was significant in the process of African American males self-identifying and, determining their role and understanding how they were perceived by others.

Researchers also validated findings from the interviews as indicated by Ford and Moore (2013) and Holcomb-McCoy (2007), that many of the African American males were already stigmatized from being labeled “at risk” based on an unsupportive home

environment which allowed them to fall behind. This in many cases was evident as the student transitioned from the middle school environment. According to Montgomery and Hirth (2011), studies reflected that it was a greater likelihood that if an African American male was retained during primary grade years, he had a higher likelihood of being a high school dropout.

In addition to the constant battle of fighting the negative influences, intimidation and greater responsibilities, students then encountered academic struggles, frequently attributed to instructional tactics used by their teachers (Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013). Previous research in this study indicated that because of the diversity of individuals studied and their experiences, it was found that traditional instructional practices may not be appropriate to the learning needs of the African American male students (Johnson & Gooliaff).

Research Question 5

Are freshman academies a successful intervention? Why or why not?

The research finding attributed success of the freshman academies to the fulfillment of necessary qualities such as building stronger academic foundations, establishing positive relationships, setting expectations, and providing early intervention. The findings of this study support previous research that freshmen academies are considered a successful intervention (McDougal, 2009; Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013). The primary focus according to Riddle (n.d.) was to promote a healthy transition and build a sound foundation the first year. In building the foundation, Stewart (2008) described how the freshman academy setting instilled into students a greater ambition to be committed to achieving higher academic outcomes. Interviewees sought this in their mission to

challenge students to be focused on functioning independently and with regard to higher standards.

Conclusions

1. Students entered into ninth grade in a very immature state of mind where their level of responsibility outweighs their capacity to understand how to function and adapt to the change.
2. Although each program sought to achieve the same goals, there was no consensus in the way each program operated indicating that every situation may be different and may call for different measures.
3. There was no identified standardized process that all districts use in managing their freshman academies.
4. Freshman academies were not part of a linear learning model. Because they were in isolated buildings, in many cases, they operate with procedures that are unique to the traditional practices that exist when students transition to the 10 to 12 grade level facilities. As a result when they move to this next level they are not building on what was already developed they are starting the learning process over again after this transition.
5. Administrators of freshman academies did not have preparation for handling the specific needs of ninth grade.

Implications

Characteristics associated to the freshman academy setting were significant for the positive growth and academic development of African American males. Perceptions of freshman academy administrators validate that there were advantages that freshman academies offered incoming ninth grade African American males such as being relationship driven facilities that were structured specifically with support systems in place to offset negative influence and poor academic success. Freshman academies were established for the purpose of developing the mindset and behavioral skills needed to survive ninth grade and function successfully thereafter.

First, school systems should examine programs for students entering ninth grade to determine if instructional practices and support systems are consistent to assist students with reaching the targeted learning objectives necessary to show growth and sustain from dropping out of school

Second, each of the interviewees in this study acknowledged the need to establish a connection to the African American males as early as possible during the school year to further encourage the academic success and social cultivation of African American males. Therefore, emphasis through staff development should be placed on how to prepare teachers and administrators to build more efficient relationships with students.

As indicated by two of the interviewees, it was very important to know where a student is coming from as well as the various circumstances which may affect them. Professional development should also be sought on making sure teachers and administrators are well informed and educated about the various cultures and backgrounds they will have to deal with in their classrooms, which students, particularly, African American males may inhabit.

Third, enrichment opportunities should be made available. The implications for freshman academy administrators should be to build partnerships with outside organizations that will participate with their school and create an ongoing partnership where they provide mentors to come to school and work with the African American males and serve as role models.

Lastly, the practice of providing early remediation was beneficial to the success of African American males. If administrators can identify weaknesses and provide necessary academic and social supports early on, the students will have a greater likelihood of being successful. One implication here is that students having academic issues are in need of this learning time and should be provided early interventions to enhance their chances of succeeding. A second implication is for school boards to take action by creating student intervention programs for this particular group of students.

Hence, data indicated the perceptions of freshman academy administrators and their understanding of the impact that freshman academies have in creating a positive atmosphere for African American males to achieve success in ninth grade, thus enabling them to be successful in succeeding high school years and graduate from high school.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Districts should establish consistency in the structure, processes, and procedures incorporated in each school's freshman academy to ensure a progressive transition of ninth grade students is being implemented.

Recommendation 2

A training model should be developed for current administrators to go through before assuming the role as a freshman academy administrator. Leaders of freshman academies should have previous administrative experience before being assigned to lead a freshman academy.

Recommendation 3

The ninth grade curriculum used in freshman academies should be tailored to target the individual learning needs of the students attending the academy.

Recommendation 4

Freshman academies should conduct a mandatory summer camp to orientate parents and students with the structures and customs of high school. A preparation camp allows students time to adjust their focus and settle into a high school mindset before the first day of class at the academy. Preparing the students will also answer the questions of what they should expect and address questions for students and parents about requirements for academics and social behavior.

Recommendations for Future Research

One recommendation is to examine teacher perspectives of the effectiveness of freshmen academies on the academic achievement of African American males.

A second recommendation is to conduct a study comparing the administrator perspectives of the academic achievement of African American males in freshman academies to the academic achievement of males of other races in freshmen academies.

A third recommendation is to conduct research to consider the necessary training and preparation required for teachers to handle diversity issues while working in ninth grade academies.

A fourth recommendation is to conduct a study examining the preparation for administrators to lead ninth grade academies.

A fifth recommendation is to examine the perceptions of superintendents and school boards perspectives of the effectiveness of freshmen academies on the academic achievement of African American males.

Concluding Thoughts

In concluding this study, the success and survival of a freshman academy is dependent on freshman academy administrators combatting the prevailing obstacles affecting the success of students of varying demographics. This researcher has placed his focus on the African American males during this ninth grade year and the administrators' perception of the success in the program. From the researcher's point of view, transition is the emphasis of the freshman academy structure. Though implemented in each of the settings sought out by the researcher for this study, the varying degrees of implementation can ultimately effect the overall outcome of the students in the program. If not successful, students leaving the ninth grade will still be subject to the same issues considered to be a challenge to them in the ninth grade, during their tenth grade year.

As previously indicated within the study, issues surrounding the transition to ninth grade include students ability to build relationships in their new environments, learning how to be accountable, and understanding more rigorous coursework. In order to be effective in the transition, administrators must ensure that measures implemented will reduce these obstacles, as well as the barriers determined to be encountered in the tenth grade. In addition, they must remedy these issues as well as those issues that African American males specifically confront in order to obtain success.

It is noted from the results of this study that the perceptions of the participants were positive regarding the success of African American males in Freshman Academies. Each administrator that was interviewed provided the objective, procedures, and outcomes of the implementation of the freshman academy in their district as well as provided details on how specific processes impacted their African American male students.

Another important factor observed from the study was that there was no specialized training or requirements for administrators or teachers that work within the freshman academy setting. There was not any criteria that designated them as having the understanding to lead the concerted efforts of a freshman academy, ultimately resulting in them being underprepared to face the adversities of this environment. In retrospect, recognizing this lack of preparation and guidance to manage freshman academies explains the inconsistences that exist amongst the programs in the state that could potentially impact transition in a negative way. This researcher identified differences in the location, structure, procedures, and demographic makeup of the freshman academies. There was also differences in the responsibilities and daily operation of each building and what is defined as the standard for success.

The research literature sought for this study was limited. There was information pertaining to freshman academies and African American students, but was not very extensive in regards to African American males. Future research initiatives should specifically target the data that measures the impact that freshman academies make in the lives of African American males and their academic achievement.

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APPENDICES A

INTERVIEW PROTOCAL

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your role as a freshman academy administrator.
2. Begin by telling me about the academic makeup of the school prior to the implementation of the freshman academy. How about the freshman class particularly?
3. What caused the change to a freshman academy?
4. How long have you been in existence?
5. What did dropout rate and retention look like prior to the change?
6. Can you tell me about your procedures for selecting the freshman academy as the intervention to assist students?
7. Why was it a best fit as opposed to any other intervention?
8. What would you say have been successes of the program implementation?
9. What were undesirable outcomes and how were they handled?
10. In what ways have changes been made since the implementation to make it work?
11. Have test scores been impacted?
12. How does your school look differently after the implementation of the freshman academy, particularly for African American males?
13. Tell me about the responses from students, teachers, parents, and community at the onset of this reorganization.
14. What were the reactions of students and faculty to the 9th grade academy?
15. How did student population demographics factor into this decision?
16. On what basis would you recommend starting a freshman academy to another school?
17. How have instructional practices changed?
18. Talk about a couple of the successes with African American males.
19. How did you recruit or select the faculty for the 9th grade academy?
20. How were teachers encouraged to want to work with the 9th grade academy considering the challenges that comes with 9th grade students?
21. Please describe what the demographic makeup of your 9th grade faculty looks like (Gender, Race, Age, etc).
22. Is the same administrator maintained for the program each year? What would constitute them being replaced?
23. Is there a standard curriculum that 9th grade academy teachers must follow?
24. What kind of training does 9th grade academy teachers receive in regards to diversity? Differentiated instruction?

APPENDICES B

CONSENT FORM

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Willie Matthews, a student in the Counseling, Foundations and Leadership department at Columbus State University. Dr. Pamela A. Lemoine is the supervising faculty member of this study.

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to describe the perspectives of freshman academy administrators on the success of freshman academies as an intervention to promote the success of African American males during their freshman year of high school. The data from this research will be used to describe the school structure and setting, operational issues of the academy, and the principal's background and perceptions of the freshman academy.

II. Procedures:

By voluntering to participate in this study, you will be asked to have a one-on-one interview with the researcher to gather data regarding your opinion of the successfulness of the design, structure, and interactions of their freshman academy on African American males. The purpose of the study will be restated to all participants at the beginning of the interview. These interviews will be audio recorded by the researcher. Upon completion of all administrative interviews, data will be transcribed, and returned to participants for their review to verify that the researcher appropriately summarized their responses to the interview questions. After the participant reviews the transcipt for meaning, they will return to the research to begin the data analysis process.

The interview questions will include open-ended questions which will cause the overall interviews to vary in length and content. However the expected time for an interview should not extend more than one hour and a half. Your total participation time to this study will not exceed two hours, allowing for additional time to review the interview transcript.

III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:

There should be no more than minimal risk involved in this study. Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

IV. Potential Benefits:

As an educator and mentor the information that transpires will be beneficial to those who also serve in those capacities seeking to improve academic achievement. It is hoped that through the examination of the perceptions of freshman academy administrators, the researcherwill be able to describe the characteristics which render freshman academies as an effective intervention for academically failing African American males.

V. Costs and Compensation:

There will not be any compentation for participation in this study.

VI. Confidentiality:

Information obtained as a result of participation in this research will be kept confidential. The researcher will maintain record of participants by coding documentation and their identities. Pseudonyms will be used as necessary to disguise participants identity. Reports or data used in the study will not reflect the name of the participant or any other details which could potentially expose the identity of the individual or the school. All transcripts and audio recordings will be locked and stored in the Office of Academic Affairs in Richards Hall until the earliest possible time in which they can be destroyed according to Columbus State University IRB Policy.

VII. Withdrawal:

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Willie Matthews at 706-718-4356 or matthews_willie@columbusstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu.

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project. Ialso acknowledge that I am at least 18 years old and hereby take responsibility for my responses and participation in this study.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

APPENDICES C

SUPERINTENDENTS LETTER

August 12, 2015

Superintendent
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxx, Georgia xxxx

Dear Superintendent:

I am a student in the Doctoral Program in Curriculum and Leadership at Columbus State University. The purpose of this letter is request permission to conduct a qualitative research study on schools that have been identified as having a freshman academy.

The purpose of this study is to describe the perspectives of freshman academy administrators on the success of freshman academies as an intervention to promote the success of African American males during their freshman year of high school. The data from this research will be used to describe the school structure and setting, operational issues of the academy, and the principal's background and perceptions of the freshman academy.

This study will involve one-on-one, audio recorded interviews. The information that transpires from this research will be beneficial to those who also serve in those capacities seeking to improve academic achievement. It is hoped that through the examination of the perceptions of freshman academy administrators, the researcher will be able to describe the characteristics which render freshman academies as an effective intervention for academically failing African American males. All data collected will remain confidential participants and school's information will not be disclosed in the study. Documents and audio recordings will be kept locked and secured until at such designated time it will be destroyed.

I have attached a response letter and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your convenience. Your agreement signifies that you allow administrators from your district to participate in interviews. Your employees' participation in this study is voluntary and may choose to decline participating or withdraw from the study at any point in the process.

If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact me at (706) 718-4356 or via e-mail at Matthews_willie@ColumbusState.edu or my advisor, Dr. Pamela Lemoine at (706)565-7819 or via e-mail at Lemoine_Pamela@ColumbusState.edu. Thank you your attenton to this matter.

Sincerely,

Willie Matthews

APPENDICES D

SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSE LETTER

Superintendent Response Letter

Please sign and return letter by August 26, 2015. An addressed, stamped envelope is included for your convenience.

Check your response:

____ As Superintendent of **XXXXXXXXX School District**, I consent to administrators from the district participating in a research study to describe the perspectives of freshman academy administrators on the success of freshman academies as an intervention to promote the success of African American males during their freshman year of high school.

I understand that all data will be confidential and used to describe the school structure and setting, operational issues of the academy, and the principal's background and perceptions of the freshman academy.

_____ I do not consent to participation in this study.

Name (printed or typed):_____

Signature: _____ Date:_____

APPENDICES E

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

September, 2015

Attn: School Principal
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Dear,

I am a student in the Doctoral Program in Curriculum and Leadership at Columbus State University. I am conducting a research study to describe the perspectives of freshman academy administrators on the success of freshman academies as an intervention to promote the success of African American males during their freshman year of high school.

The data from this research will be used to describe the school structure and setting, operational issues of the academy, and the principal's background and perceptions of the freshman academy. I am writing to ask if you and or your administrative staff members responsible for the daily operations of your Freshman Academy would be available for me to interview for this research project. I have obtained the necessary approval from your superintendent to conduct research in your district, however, participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be kept confidential.
If you are interested, please respond to this e-mail indicating that you will participate as well as specify who I should be in contact with regarding the freshman academy at your school. At that time I will make contact with your designated representative to schedule a day and time within the next two weeks that I can conduct this interview.
If you have any questions regarding this research study or need any additional information, please contact me at (706) 718-4356 or via e-mail at Matthews_willie@ColumbusState.edu or my advisor, Dr. Pamela Lemoine at (706) 565-7819 or via e-mail at Lemoine_Pamela@ColumbusState.edu.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate any support you can give me with this process!

Sincerely,

Willie Matthews
Doctoral Student
Columbus State University